

'Heritage centre' to be moved from development area

By Ramadan Rawashdeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Following a decision by Amman Mayor Mamdouh Abbadi, a 70-year-old 'heritage centre' owned and operated by the Circassian community in Ras Al 'Ain, one of the oldest districts of Amman, is to be moved and re-erected not far from its present location.

The centre, built in the old traditional style and inaugurated by the late King Abdullah, founder of the Kingdom, is located within an area that is being developed by the Greater Amman Municipality.

The centre comprises a public library and a multipurpose hall that has been used as a meeting place for politicians, writers and senior public figures since its establishment.

Dr. Abbadi has given instructions that the heritage centre be pulled down stone by stone and re-built in the same style and form 30 metres away from its original location, not far from the new city hall and other modern municipality buildings, including the mayor and the municipality's offices, a cultural centre, a mosque and other public facilities.

The municipality's complex at the site is being built on 140 dunums of land, and the Circassian centre had to be moved to make room for the completion of these plans.

The Amman municipality has long adopted a plan and allocated funds to purchase traditional and old homes in Amman built in the traditional Islamic style and restore them as part of the country's cultural 'heritage'. Buildings covered under this plan include the birthplace of His Majesty King Hussein and the old Zahraa School, not far from the former municipality building.

The municipality is at present building a plaza of fountains at the site while going ahead with plans to complete the new complex.



Princess Basma commends schools' efforts in raising education standard

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Princess Basma on Wednesday delivered an address to the seventh conference of the Private Schools' Cultural Forum commending the efforts of public and private schools to raise the standard of education for the new generation.

Such meetings in which the participants exchange ideas and experiences are needed to enhance the educational process in the Kingdom, said the Princess, who praised the level of cooperation between private and public schools.

Hisham Khatib, member of the board of trustees of the

Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAF), opened the meeting by pointing out that the education offered by private schools has improved dramatically and contributed to raising the standard of students' education.

Dr. Khatib told the participants, who represent 26 private schools which are members of the forum, that the programmes of private schools have contributed to the introduction of modern technology and developed the methodology of education.

Several personalities and

institutions that have contributed to the forum's activities were presented with honorary shields.

The two-day meeting will review a number of working papers dealing with various aspects of the educational process.

The forum is designed to help promote the educational system in Jordan, bolster relations between private schools, improve the proficiency of teaching staffs and enable private schools to exchange ideas and experiences in academic, sports, technical, social and other fields.

Federation of Labour Unions elects new chairperson

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Central Council of the Federation of Jordanian Labour Unions (FJLU) has elected Mazen Ma'a'ita as the federation's new chairperson and Fathallah Omrani as deputy chairperson.

The elections were held with the participation of 102 council members representing the 17 Jordanian unions. Each union is represented in the council by six members elected at the meeting.

Messrs. Ma'a'ita and Omrani were elected unopposed after the incumbent chairperson, Khaled Shreim and Khalil Hiyasari respectively, withdrew

from the race. Eleven members of the council, which has a mandate ending in the year 2002, are affiliated with political parties.

Addressing a meeting after the election, the newly elected chairperson pledged to work diligently with the council members to reduce unemployment, amend the present Social Security Corporation Law to favour workers, and ensure a comprehensive health insurance scheme covering all workers in Jordan.

Noting that the economic and political developments in the Middle East are affecting workers, Mr.

Ma'a'ita said he is determined to help introduce amendments to current laws to set a minimum wage for workers, strengthen relations with federations in the Arab World and organise training courses for workers.

For his part, Mr. Omrani said the council will study the various union proposals submitted and focus attention on the question of poverty and attracting investments to create jobs.

The 11 politically affiliated council members identify with the Islamic Action Front, the National Constitutional Party, the Jordan Communist Party and the Progressive Unionist Party.

Planned rally marking Israel's 50th anniversary of occupation banned

By Francesca Ciriaci
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The government on Wednesday banned a rally planned by the Islamist-led coalition of opposition parties to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Israel's 1948 occupation of Palestine.

Officials told the Jordan Times that the ban was issued in compliance with the 1992 Political Parties Law, which stipulates that the activities of political parties must be restricted to party premises.

The rally, planned for Thursday, was to start from the headquarters of the Union of the Professional Associations.

Opposition leaders responded by urging citizens and politicians to boycott an Israeli embassy reception to be held on Thursday to celebrate Israel's 50th independence day.

The opposition has called for a boycott of Israeli national day celebrations every year since Jordan and Israel signed the 1994 peace treaty and

exchanged diplomatic missions.

The rally, organised by the 15 opposition parties represented in the Higher Committee for Coordination Among the Opposition Parties (HCCAOP), was meant to coincide with this year's Israeli embassy function.

"The government says that [it banned the rally] because we submitted the request in the name of the Higher Committee," a body that is not recognised by the government.

"But I am sure that, even if we sent [the request] in some other way, the answer would have still been no," said Deputy Mohammad Ouran (Tafila), who is currently holding the six-month chair of the HCCAOP.

Opposition leaders told a press conference at the headquarters of the Islamic Action Front (IAF) that the Amman governor on Tuesday refused to authorise the rally. They added that 11th-hour negotiations on Tuesday and Wednesday with officials at

the Ministry of Interior also failed.

Meanwhile, the Israeli embassy here confirmed that preparations were proceeding for Thursday's reception.

"The number of regrets that we have received is not unusual for any diplomatic function by any other embassy," said the Israeli embassy spokesperson, Ro'ey Gilad.

The Israeli embassy declined to specify the number of invitations sent or the number of regrets received so far.

"After 50 years of struggle, having the Israeli embassy celebrate the occupation of Palestine here, in Amman, while our public meetings are banned, is simply unbelievable," said Dr. Ouran, who is also the secretary general of the left-wing Arab Land Party.

The HCCAOP accused the government of going out of its way to "please the Israelis at the expense of its own people."

"The government is allow-

ing aggressors and occupiers to celebrate on our soil," said IAF Deputy Secretary General Hanan Sa'id, a hardline Islamist.

Mr. Sa'id referred to the establishment of the Jewish state as "the worst memory in our life," and asked the government to shut down the Israeli embassy.

"Struggling for the Holy Land is the 'abc' of our language, and it is a sacred duty for all Arabs to oppose the occupation of Palestine," Dr. Ouran told reporters.

Notwithstanding the government's ban, the HCCAOP announced a series of initiatives, including debates, seminars, and book exhibitions, to be held over the next few weeks in different parts of the Kingdom.

Half of Jordanians are of Palestinian origins. Though most of them have been fully integrated into Jordan's economy and society, some 350,000 Palestinians forced to flee their homes in the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli conflicts are still living in camps.

Disaster management centre, UNDP sign training agreement

By Ahmad Khatib
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Hashemite Charity Organisation (HCO) and the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) Wednesday signed an agreement to improve Jordan's ability to handle natural and man-made disasters.

The accord will help the HCO Disaster Management Training Centre (DMTC) cope with both situations through a strategy based on planning, response, and the timely dissemination of disaster-related information.

UNDP Resident Representative Jorgen Lissner signed the deal with Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Salam Abbadi, who is also HCO secretary general. The organisation was set up by HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, who also chairs its board of directors.

Jordan will make a \$211,000 in-kind donation, while the UNDP will grant \$197,000 to the one-year project, which will help train civil servants and staff of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in disaster management.

Iyad Abu Mughli, UNDP senior environmental officer, said the agency was planning to hold a regional workshop in Jordan on disaster management within the next two months.

"Participants from Arab and Islamic countries will attend," he told the Jordan Times.

Prince Hassan established the DMTC in 1995, the only such facility in the region, with the hope of expanding its services to Arab and Islamic countries in the region.

The HCO is a non-governmental organisation set up 1990 after hundreds of thousands of Jordanians fled Kuwait because of the Gulf crisis.

Jordan is susceptible to natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, flash floods and occasional severe snowfall and to man-made catastrophes such as traffic and industrial accidents, influxes of refugees and displaced people from neighbouring countries.

Attorney plans appeal after court upholds man's death sentence

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The defence attorney of a 52-year-old man sentenced to death for the 1989 murder of his wife Wednesday said he is planning to appeal the decision at a higher court.

Attorney Taha Ali Rawashdeh said he was not convinced with the court's decision to sentence his client, Ahmad Ali, to death, adding that he felt his client should have benefited from a reduction in penalty.

"My client killed his wife to cleanse his honour, a fact the Criminal Court did not take into consideration," Mr. Rawashdeh told the Jordan Times.

Mr. Ali's death sentence was upheld by the Criminal Court, headed by Judge Jihad Kha-

sawneh and including Judges Ahmad Khatib and Yassin Abdullah, following a higher court's request to reconsider the original sentence.

In its original ruling on Dec. 8, 1997, the Criminal Court sentenced Mr. Ali to death for the premeditated murder of his wife, Amneh Hassan, 40, a mother of nine.

The defendant claimed in court that he killed and buried his wife in a cave in the Tabea Fahel area in the northern part of the Kingdom for reasons of honour, stating that "he saw a man leaving his house late at night."

However, the Criminal Court then rejected his pleas of cleansing his honour and sentenced him to death.

The Court of Cassation returned the case to the Criminal Court to "reconsider the defendant's accusations and

determine if he should benefit from a reduction in penalty."

According to court documents, the defendant told police that he decided to kill his wife after seeing a man leave his house late at night in 1989 upon returning home from a party.

The court added that "although his wife denied having an affair, he did not believe her and plotted to kill her."

On the evening of the incident, it maintained, the defendant lured his wife to a deserted cave, shot her twice in the back and buried her in the cave.

The following morning, he asked his children about his wife's whereabouts, then went and placed a missing person ad in the newspaper.

Two months later, the defendant married another woman, the court said.



Minister of Transport and Telecommunications Sami Gammoh on Wednesday briefs the U.S. delegation on regional developments (Petra photo)

Visiting U.S. defence college delegation briefed on regional developments

AMMAN (Petra) — A delegation from the U.S. National Defence College Wednesday met with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marshal Abdul Hafez Miral Kaabneh and discussed the general political situation in the Middle East. U.S.-Jordanian military cooperation and issues of common concern to the two countries.

The delegation, led by

retired Admiral Wesley MacDonald, was briefed on the development and the duties of the Jordan Armed Forces and their role within the U.N. peace-keeping forces around the world.

Also Wednesday, the delegation met with acting Foreign Minister Sami Gammoh, who outlined Jordan's foreign policies and the Kingdom's principled stand vis-a-vis the

peace process.

Voicing Jordan's hope that the U.S. will play a more active role in establishing peace and security in the Middle East, Mr. Gammoh said security and economic prosperity for all peoples depend on the establishment of a just peace.

The minister also discussed the Middle East situation with the delegation members.

Prize-winning machine expected to improve students' technical skills

By Mohammad Ben Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A government high school has won HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, 1998 "Scientific Prize" for developing an electrical machine that allows students to do experiments and is almost five times cheaper than similar imported equipment.

The Prince Abdullah bin El Hussein Professional Assembling School, in the governorate of Ajloun, north of Amman, received the prize last week at a special ceremony held under the patronage of Prince Hassan.

Teachers Wednesday said the electricity-circuit machine will help improve the technical and vocational skills of students focusing on electrical studies through its multi-purpose

applications, including how to lay electricity lines at homes and inside car engines.

"The project has two main objectives: a practical one and an economic one," a teacher, who requested anonymity, told the Jordan Times.

"It will help students develop their basic skills to be able to cope with the needs of the local market while allowing the teacher to directly supervise

the trainees to boost their creativity and self-reliance."

The machine was assembled by schoolteacher Bassem Hleil Badr at a cost of JD847 — well below the JD4,000 cost on international markets.

"In addition, it does not require much maintenance and cuts the timing of each exercise to one hour instead of the three hours it takes on the traditional machine," said the

teacher.

This machine could be used by community colleges and professional schools across the Kingdom, he added.

"The school wanted to launch an initiative to upgrade the country's educational standard while trying to bridge the gap with the world's modern technology at the cheapest possible rates," he said. "Thankfully, we succeeded in our mission."

what's going on

SCANDINAVIAN FILM WEEK

* Finnish film "Dog Thieves," Icelandic film "Benjamin Dove," and Swedish film "The Brothers Lionheart" at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday at 11:00 a.m., 4:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., respectively.

* Norwegian film "Carl and the Angels," Swedish film "Nature's Warrior," and Norwegian film "Whitbear King Leif" at the Royal Cultural Centre on Friday at 11:00 a.m., 4:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., respectively.

FILMS

* Classical film "El Verdugo" at Instituto Cervantes, Jabel Amman on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.

* "The Lost World" at the American Center, Abdou on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.

* "Portrait of an Artist" (in Arabic) about artist Francis Bacon (with commentary in Arabic by Dr. Mazen Asfour) at Darat Al Fuman, Jabel Weibdeh on Thursday at 6:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Works by Ecuadorian artist Olmedo Quimbata at Instituto Cervantes, Jabel Amman, until May 12.

* Paintings by Naji Al Sanjori at Hammurabi Art Gallery, Gerdens Street (Tel. 5536098), until May 3.

* Works by Yassin Al Mohammadawi at the Orient Gallery, Shmeisani (Tel. 5681303/4), until May 7.

* Photographic exhibition entitled "A Tour in the Dead Sea" by Jaussen and Savignac at the French Cultural Centre, until April 30.

* Paintings by Lebanese-American artist Etel Adnan entitled "Amis's Book of Art and Poetry" at Darat Al Fuman, Jabel Weibdeh, until May 21. Also displaying works by Berlin-based Syrian artist Marwan Bahi entitled "A Suite of Heads," and works by contemporary Arab artists.

Russia's new reformist cabinet could become dependent on regions

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russia woke up to a new government Wednesday with market reformers occupying key posts in Sergei Kiriyenko's cabinet, but analysts warned he could become dependent on powerful regional leaders to push reforms through.

President Boris Yeltsin retained Boris Nemtsov in the new cabinet announced Tuesday, making the high-profile reformer one of three deputy prime ministers and, according to government sources, acting premier in Mr. Kiriyenko's absence.

Further underscoring the incoming administration's commitment to reform, Viktor Khristenko was named alongside Mr. Nemtsov as deputy prime minister, while Mr. Kiriyenko kept on technocrat Mikhail Zadornov as finance minister. A third deputy premier has still to be announced.

However, the announcement that a troika of reformers would occupy key economic posts met with a muted response from the financial markets. Dmitry Konov, broker at MFK-Renaissance, said: "The market is a little higher, but is not especially optimistic."

Pundits say the government's room for manoeuvre over the economy is tight, hemmed in by poor tax collection, burgeoning wage

arrears, spiralling debt and a strained budget. Political analysts also questioned whether the new cabinet would have the clout to force controversial market reforms through a hostile state Duma lower house of parliament, cowed into accepting Mr. Kiriyenko as premier by the threat of dissolution.

In a counterpoint to the youthful technocrats holding economic posts, Mr. Yeltsin confirmed the veteran Yevgeny Primakov, 68, as foreign minister and Igor Sergeyev, 60, as defence minister, with Mr. Yeltsin loyalist Sergei Stepashin, 46, given interior.

Andrei Piontkovsky, director of the Moscow-based Centre for Strategic Studies, said as deputy prime minister Mr. Khristenko would handle regional policy as he had done while Mr. Zadornov's deputy at finance.

The appointment highlighted the new-found importance of regional elites and signalled Mr. Kiriyenko's government would rely on the Federation Council, or upper chamber of parliament, whose members are drawn from Russia's 89 regions, to implement its economic reform programme.

Mr. Khristenko "will continue this job but the status of the job has been upgraded because the relationship with regions and governors in the Federation Council is very important for the government," Mr. Piontkovsky said.

"The idea of the government is to rely on support of the Federation Council rather than the Duma because the governors are the real administration," he added.

Other analysts nevertheless predicted problems ahead for Mr. Kiriyenko, saying his avowed desire to head a cabinet picked for technical competence rather than political affiliations had resulted in a politically weak government.

"For a government of professional technocrats to work efficiently, they need strong political protection. Such protection does not exist and cannot exist in the near future," said Nikolai Petrov, of the Carnegie Endowment think-tank.

Although an efficient administrator, Mr. Kiriyenko was now completely dependent on his mentor Mr. Yeltsin, Mr. Petrov said.

CIS summit under way

MOSCOW (AFP) — Leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) began Wednesday a summit aimed at discussing wide-ranging structural reforms of the ex-Soviet grouping.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin began a 1hr 45mins speech to the leaders of the 12 member states, some of whom previously expressed little hope that anything concrete would be achieved by the summit.

Mr. Yeltsin however told delegates that "the peoples of the CIS are not only expecting a declaration stating that the commonwealth exists, but also and especially, actions and concrete measures," reported the agency Interfax.

He went on to urge presidents Robert Kocharian of Armenia and Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan to "sit down at their desks and sign a document putting an end to their problems."

Armenia and Azerbaijan dispute the ownership of the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave which is situated in Azerbaijan but with a mainly Armenian population.

The two leaders, whose countries fought over the enclave from 1988 to 1994, met Tuesday for the first time since the Armenian presidential elections, which brought to power Mr. Kocharian, considered a hero of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian-backed war to secede from Azerbaijan.

Further bilateral meetings among CIS members got under way on the eve of the summit and were due to continue Wednesday.

Analysts predict the summit, twice postponed due to Mr. Yeltsin's ill health, is likely to be less animated than the acrimonious conference in Moldova last October at which Russia was pilloried, despite the planned signature of more than 800 accords.

Turkmen President Saparmurad Niyazov said on arrival in Moscow that he did "not attach any special expectations to the coming meeting," although bilateral meetings might prove fruitful.

The grouping comprises Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

Asked by Europe 1 Radio if he would submit a "National Preference" law, Ms. Le Chevallier said: "That would be one of the first things I'd do."

The National Front, which controls four town halls in southern France, advocates sending Arab and African immigrants home and amending the constitution to give preference to French citizens in jobs, housing and other state benefits.

Vitrolles, another Riviera town run by the National Front, introduced a "Baby Bonus" of 5,000 francs (\$831) this year for native French and European Union

couples who produced offspring.

A court declared it discriminatory and illegal and the front appealed the ruling.

The first couple to accept the bonus in January later sent the money back, saying they were ashamed to have accepted it.

Ms. Le Chevallier, whose husband is also mayor of Toulon and a European Parliament deputy, declined to tell Europe 1 whether she would give up her National Assembly seat to her spouse once his one-year period of parliamentary ineligibility is over.

which her husband Jean-Marie won last year but then lost because he exceeded legal limits on campaign spending.

But Ms. Le Chevallier, who led the first round of voting with 39.5 per cent, may get the chance to submit the proposed bill.

Her opponent, Socialist Odette Casanova, won 22.3 per cent. The mainstream conservative parties, still reeling from the shock of National Front advances in regional elections last month, have refused to throw their support behind her to block the extreme right from winning.

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Russian President Boris Yeltsin (left) votes as influential businessman Boris Berezovsky looks on during his appointment as Secretary of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the body which groups 12 of the 15 ex-Soviet republics. Berezovsky, 52, replaces Ivan Korotchenya and is expected in his new job to spearhead efforts to reform the CIS, a loose body dismissed by many as just a talking shop (Reuters photo)

U.K. tells ex-POWs it will not ask Japan for more cash

LONDON (R) — Britain Wednesday rejected appeals from survivors of Japanese prisoner-of-war camps to lobby Tokyo for more compensation, saying there was no legal basis for doing so.

Campaigners for the surviving prisoners want Britain to reopen a 1951 peace treaty with Japan under which Tokyo paid small sums of money to camp survivors.

But Junior Foreign Office Minister Derek Fatchett said the British government had studied the case for challenging the treaty in 1955 and decided to do nothing.

"The preliminary legal advice that is given to us as a government and (upon) which we have to act is that 40 years or more later it is impossible for us to reopen that treaty," he told BBC radio.

"The simple fact is that we have been told by the Japanese the treaty will not be reopened," said Mr. Fatchett, who met representatives of the prisoners late Tuesday.

Martyn Day, a solicitor representing the prisoners, said the 1951 treaty contained a clause saying that if Japan was more generous to camp survivors from other

nations Britain had the right to seek more money.

He said foreign office documents from 1955 revealed the government knew that Japanese and Swiss survivors had been paid 50 times more than British victims.

"All along we've been told the British government had no legal right to go back to the Japanese and here are these documents saying they did have those rights," he told BBC radio.

"I think it's very depressing indeed that we've reached this stage — after 50 years of the prisoners of war bashing their heads against the Japanese — that this government has decided they're not prepared to do anything more."

Later Wednesday parliament is due to debate prisoners' demands for compensation and a meaningful apology from Japan for the abuse they suffered.

Thousands of allied prisoners were forced by the Japanese imperial army to work as slave labourers during the war and many were tortured or starved and died in captivity.

Some survivors say they plan to insult Japanese Emperor Akihito during an official visit next month by turning their backs on him

as he approaches Buckingham Palace with Queen Elizabeth in a guided horse-drawn coach.

Mr. Fatchett — who has raised the matter with the Japanese on several occasions since the labour government took power a year ago — said the fault lay with the conservative administration of 1955.

"We are constrained by a decision taken 43 years ago by a conservative minister. We have to live with that," he said.

"And whatever the consequences of that — and I understand some of the disappointments — we cannot pretend that decision was not taken by the then conservative government."

Disgruntled survivors say a recent decision to decorate Emperor Akihito during his visit with the order of the garter, Britain's highest award for chivalry, has made them even more bitter.

Six organisations from Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand launched a lawsuit in Tokyo three years ago, demanding an official apology and compensation of \$22,000 each from the Japanese government for inhumane treatment during their captivity.

Gunmen kill 10 farmhands in Colombia

BOGOTA (AFP) — At least 10 farmhands were killed in cold blood by a group of gunmen who ordered them off a bus near Urroa, some 300 kilometres northwest of here, the town mayor said.

About 15 heavily-armed men picked their victims from a list they carried, made them lie face down on the ground and shot them with automatic rifles and handguns, Ivan Posada told the Radionet station late Tuesday.

He said the massacre earlier Tuesday was reported by several men who managed to escape into the heavily-forested mountainside.

One of the witnesses told the radio station the death toll could be as high as 14.

It was not immediately clear whether the gunmen belonged to the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) or to paramilitary groups, both of whom roam the rugged Antioquia department, Mr. Posada said.

One of the witnesses said the gunmen wore military uniforms, the mayor added.

Rising violence is a major concern for Colombian authorities in the runup to May 31 presidential election.

seized at the house in Soacha, a police spokesman said.

The defence ministry said later that security around Bogota and other major Colombian cities was being tightened to prevent guerrilla attacks as the election draws closer.

Over the weekend, the campaign headquarters in Bogota of the ruling party's presidential candidate Horacio Serpa and the opposition's Harold Bedoya were bombed.

Mr. Bedoya, a retired army general, has vowed to crush all rebel groups.

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French extreme right wants anti-immigrant law

PARIS (R) — A candidate for France's far-right National Front said Wednesday she would promote a "National Preference" law discriminating against immigrants.

Cendrine Le Chevallier, the leading candidate for the "seat" from the Mediterranean port of Toulon, told "Europe 1" Radio she wanted to stop the immigration she said was worsening unemployment.

The law would have no chance in the National Assembly, where Ms. Le Chevallier is running for the National Front's only seat,

which her husband Jean-Marie won last year but then lost because he exceeded legal limits on campaign spending.

But Ms. Le Chevallier, who led the first round of voting with 39.5 per cent, may get the chance to submit the proposed bill.

Her opponent, Socialist Odette Casanova, won 22.3 per cent. The mainstream conservative parties, still reeling from the shock of National Front advances in regional elections last month, have refused to throw their support behind her to block the extreme right from winning.

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Indonesia students clash with security force

MEDAN, Indonesia (R) — Tear gas filled the air Wednesday as thousands of Indonesian students, many throwing stones, clashed with security forces here in a protest against President Suharto.

They surged on to the streets and torched a police motorcycle before tear gas shells forced them back onto the campus at the University of North Sumatra where they built barricades out of chairs and desks.

The university issued a statement saying the campus was closed until May 7, but it did not appear the students were immediately aware of it.

Des Wright of Reuters television said he saw students throw two Molotov cocktails at an armoured car stationed at the university's main entrance without damaging it.

Groups of students made forays to pelt the armoured car with stones while others lit fires, which they believed would diminish the effect of tear gas, and built barricades.

There were no immediate reports of injuries, nor was there any immediate indication that the security forces intended to move on to the campus.

The security forces appear to tolerate the protests, which began in February just before Mr. Suharto, 76, was reelected to a seventh five-year term by a body he largely hand-picked, as long as they remain on campus.

There have been demonstrations in most major Indonesian centres for political and economic reform. Most have been confined to campuses and most have been peaceful, though secu-



Indonesian students carry a colleague after he was overcome by tear gas fired by police and troops at the University of North Sumatra in the city of Medan. About 4,000 students demanding the ouster of President Suharto clashed with security forces at the gates of the university (Reuters photo)

city forces have acted when protests move on to the streets.

Wednesday, there was also trouble in Bandung in Western Java, where witnesses said two students and two policemen were hurt as students tried to move out of a university campus there.

The greatest violence has been at university of North Sumatra.

Wednesday began with some 4,000 students swirling out of the campus

and putting a passing policeman to flight with stones before torching his motorcycle.

Security forces arrived quickly and fired several tear gas shells at the students, who fled back on to campus. The iron gates to the main entrance, torn off its hinges by students Monday, were then put back in place and locked. The students took them off again.

Students at Medan's St. Thomas Catholic University said they planned to keep their protests peaceful, unlike Monday's confrontation at the university of North Sumatra, which security forces ended with water cannon, tear gas and a campus blockade.

"We hope the military will join us in bringing down the king," said St. Thomas student Duman Wau, referring to Mr. Suharto.

Ever-louder cries for Mr. Suharto to step down and accept responsibility for Indonesia's worst economic crisis in decades have been at the forefront of demands since the protests began.

Political analysts say there are signs of backing for the protests within the powerful military and they find it significant that the older generation has not spoken out against them.

But Mr. Suharto has shown no inclination to step aside over a crisis in which the rupiah has lost some 70 per cent of its value against the dollar since July and prices of basic foodstuffs have risen rapidly.

The international monetary fund has drawn up a bail-out package for the country worth more than \$40 billion in return for wide-ranging reforms.

The credit ratings agency Standard Poor's Corp said Wednesday it was concerned about pace of the key reforms of the bank sector.

It said it feared "that the restructuring of the Indonesian banking sector is not proceeding as quickly as first anticipated, and lags behind that of its regional neighbours."

ETA took note of public opinion heavily in favour of Basque peace talks, but it gave no indication it was willing to give up its armed struggle unless the Spanish government meets its demands for an independent Basque state.

ETA also used its latest communiqué to claim responsibility for 15 attacks since the end of January, including the assassination of a Seville city councillor and his wife.

ETA accused Spanish authorities of "not listening to anything other than the clamour to maintain a status quo that brings war, oppression and destruction to the Basque country."

Spanish officials have steadfastly refused to negotiate with ETA until it renounces violence.

ETA, which stands for Basque homeland and freedom, has killed more than 800 people in its 30-year struggle for independence.

Tibetan self immolation questions Dalai Lama's middle-path

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Tibetan self-immolation against Chinese rule in their homeland said here Wednesday has cast doubt on the Dalai Lama's non-violent middle path.

They said Thupten Gyatso's self-immolation could put their anti-Chinese campaign now firmly on the agenda of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), which draws its members from the 14th Dalai Lama's "middle path" of moderate protest.

Thupten Gyatso, 30, set himself on fire here Monday and said he had been inspired by a 19th-century Buddhist monk who had starved himself to death in protest against Chinese rule.

The self-immolation was the first such protest by a Tibetan since 1951 when China occupied Tibet.

According to the TYC, which has about 10,000 members here and thousands of followers in Tibet, Thupten Gyatso's protest was a watershed in the history of the Tibetan's non-violent struggle.

Lama Gyatso, TYC vice president and one of the group's leading figures, said the Dalai Lama did not believe in using violence during years of struggle.

"We have achieved something with the Dalai Lama's death and the Tibetan people in our land have now woken up and will support our type of struggle against China," he said.

The Middle Path is the key to the Dalai Lama's non-violent struggle for Tibet's independence. He has urged both the Chinese and the Tibetan people to work together to achieve peace.

Mr. Yeshi said the Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of 15 million Tibetans. He has urged both the Chinese and the Tibetan people to work together to achieve peace.

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Tibetan self immolation questions Dalai Lama's middle-path

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Tibetans fighting against Chinese rule in their homeland said here Wednesday the death of a compatriot for the cause could steer the campaign away from the Dalai Lama's non-violent strategy.

They said Thupten Ngodub's self-immolation could put their anti-Chinese campaign more firmly in the hands of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), which differs from their God-King's "Middle-Path" of absolute non-violence.

Ngodub, 50, set himself on fire here Monday and suffered 100-per cent burns after the police broke up a marathon hunger strike by six Tibetans. He died of cardiac arrest early Wednesday in a Delhi hospital.

The self-immolation is the first such protest by a Tibetan since 1951 when China occupied Tibet.

According to the TYC, which boasts of 10,000 members here and thousands of followers in Tibet, Ngodub's extreme protest was a watershed in the history of the Tibetan's non-violent struggle.

Karma Yeshe, TYC vice president and one of the group's hardline leaders, said: "The Dalai Lama did not achieve anything during his 40 years' of struggle."

"We have achieved something with Ngodub's death. Thousands of Tibetans in our homeland have now woken up and will support our type of campaign against China."

"The Middle Path is the strategy of His Holiness and the militant struggle is ours ... maybe one day both the angles will meet," Mr. Yeshe told AFP in an interview.

The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of six million Tibetans. He fled to India at the head of some 100,000 followers following an abortive anti-Chinese uprising in his homeland in 1959. Mr. Yeshe said although Tibetans had respect for their God-king, they were in a militant mood.

"From now our campaign would be more aggressive," the TYC vice chief said.

The Tibetan Congress in a statement said: "The Tibetan people have sent a clear message to the world that they can sacrifice themselves for the cause of an independent Tibet ... More blood will flow in the coming days."

"The Tibetan people will fight to the last drop of their blood. Tibetans of this generation will create a new chapter in the modern history of Tibet."

The Dalai Lama, while visiting Ngodub in a hospital here Tuesday, said he was "confused."

"I have made every effort for the past 20 years for the self-rule of the Tibetans but I have failed ... I am confused ... I have no alternative solution to offer."

"For many years, I have been able to persuade Tibetan people to eschew violence in our freedom struggle. Today, it is clear a sense of frustration and urgency is building up among many Tibetans as seen by the unto-death hunger strike and yesterday's tragic incident."

"This frustration stems from the fact that the Tibetan people... are being gradually wiped out from the face of the earth," he said.

Several leaders from the Tibetan government-in-exile, in the northern Indian town of Dharamsala, have previously questioned the non-violent path of their spiritual leader as well.

Pema Dhondup, editor of a Tibetan newspaper in India said: "The signals are very clear... Backers of our cause are now impatient... They want a free Tibet, at any cost."



Albanians wearing bibs spelling out 'KOSOVA' demonstrate outside the Italian Foreign Ministry as envoys of the six-nation Contact Group began talks to discuss measures to prod Yugoslavia and ethnic Albanians into negotiating a settlement to end tension and violence in Kosovo (Reuters photo)

Divided Contact Group begins meeting on Kosovo

ROME (AFP) — The Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia began talks here Wednesday on how to end the crisis in the Serbian province of Kosovo.

The discussions bring together senior foreign affairs officials from Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the United States.

Italy's Deputy Foreign Minister Piero Fassino said the talks were aimed at easing

tension in the Albanian majority province and "creating conditions for opening dialogue between the two sides."

More than 100 people have died since a Serbian crackdown was launched in March in Kosovo, whose two million population is 90 per cent ethnic Albanian.

The Contact Group in March demanded an end to the crackdown and urged

Belgrade to accept international mediation. But Belgrade has refused such outside involvement.

The United States and Britain are taking a hard line against Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, seeking to impose sanctions if he refuses to budge on Kosovo, observers say. But they are running into resistance from France and Russia.

Malaysia sends air force planes and navy ships to search for tanker

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — Malaysia sent air force planes and navy ships in renewed efforts to search for the missing tanker Petro Ranger, suspected of having been hijacked for its \$15 million cargo, a maritime official said Wednesday.

Captain Prathaban Krishnan of the Klang-based Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC), west of here, said authorities will continue to scour Malaysian waters for the missing ship. "We don't stop until we find some solid evidence of the ship. There has to be an outcome," he told AFP.

Capt. Prathaban said the search and rescue operation cannot "just be called off," when asked how long the search would last. "It will be on going. But we have done what we can," he added. The owners of the missing Malaysian-flagged oil tanker have offered a \$50,000 reward for news about the ship's fate.

The whereabouts of the Petro Ranger was a mystery, two days after its disappearance en route from Singapore to Vietnam first became

known publicly. Pirates are suspected of having seized and diverted the tanker.

The Petro Ranger, carrying 11,000 tonnes of diesel and kerosene, left Singapore on April 16 en route for Ho Chi Minh City in southern Vietnam and was last heard from on April 17.

The Petro Ranger's shipping agents, Petroships Pte. Ltd. in Singapore, said they believed it was hijacked by pirates while navigating the South China Sea. Capt. Prathaban said he was certain the ship has not sunk because if it has, the electronic position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) would transmit a signal.

"The sea at that time was also calm," he added.

Noel Choong, regional manager of the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) Regional Piracy Centre here said that if the ship has been hijacked, the pirates would have destroyed the radio beacon along with all other communications equipment.

Maritime officials said if the radio beacon, often located at the bridge is switched on, the

location of Petro Ranger could be mapped out.

Petro Ranger's crew of 21 was composed of an Australian master, seven Malaysians, six Indonesians, four Bangladeshis, one Filipino, a Ghanaian and a Myanmar national.

The Petro Ranger was the third fuel tanker to disappear since Nov. 17. The first was Atlanta 15, which was hijacked in Riau Straits, Indonesia. On Jan. 11, Tioman 1 was boarded by pirates near Aur Island in East Malaysia. In both incidents an unidentified tanker came alongside to siphon off the fuel.

Piracy on the high seas in South East Asia is expected to soar both in frequency and brutality as regional economic turmoil continues, maritime officials have warned.

The IMB in January said piracy throughout the world rose slightly to 229 cases last year, with killings rising and South East Asian waters, notably those around Indonesia, remaining the most dangerous.

Clouds of dissent gather ahead of Beijing University centenary

BEIJING (AFP) — Dissident calls for the release of imprisoned former students and the reported arrest of an alumnus activist Wednesday clouded plans for Beijing University's centenary celebrations next week.

A Hong Kong-based rights group said Wang Youcai — a student leader of the 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square — had disappeared after travelling to Beijing to attend the May 4 ceremonies.

It was suspected authorities detained Mr. Wang to prevent him from causing trouble during the high-profile celebrations, the Information Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said, citing other mainland dissidents.

Mr. Wang disappeared Monday, a day after travelling to Beijing from his home in eastern Hangzhou city, the group said in a faxed statement. As a Beijing University alumnus, he had received a formal invitation to attend the centenary.

A desk clerk at the Tianfu Hotel, near the university

campus, told AFP Mr. Wang vacated his room Monday after one night but could not confirm whether he paid his own bill and checked himself out normally.

"I was not here at the time," the clerk said.

Eighteen other alumni of the university who are now dissidents in the United States — including Wang Dan and astrophysicist Fang Lizhi — meanwhile issued an open letter urging university leaders to press for the release of five former students now imprisoned for their views.

The five are Li Hai, Hu Shigen, Lu Zhizhao, Guo Hailiang and Li Baiguang.

"We appeal to the alumni of Beijing University returning for the celebrations to use all means to remind university authorities not to forget these five people, and to take measures to help free them from prison," a copy of the letter faxed to AFP said.

University leaders had "an obligation" to help, it said.

In addition to Wang Dan and Mr. Fang — both key figures in the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement, which was

led by Beijing University students — signatories included prominent dissidents Wang Juntao, Chen Yizi and Hu Ping.

After the army's brutal June 4, 1989 crackdown on the Tiananmen protests, the government placed strict controls on student and faculty life on campus to suppress political debate.

The state-controlled media have been promoting the May 4 centenary by emphasising Beijing University's role as a hotbed of Marxist discussion when the ruling Communist Party was in its infancy.

Wang Youcai was listed by authorities as the 15th most wanted student activist following the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. He was sentenced to four years in prison for his role in the demonstrations but was released on good behaviour in November 1991.

In recent months, he had joined other dissidents in signing several open letters to the Chinese government, mainly calling for the release of political prisoners and an official reassessment of the events of 1989.

U.S., China upbeat over presidential summit

BEIJING (AFP) — China and the United States declared Wednesday their turbulent relations were on the mend and the upcoming visit of U.S. President Bill Clinton would add further impetus to their "strategic partnership."

"The United States and China have moved well down the road towards establishing a strategic partnership," visiting U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said after officially opening a hotline between Washington and Beijing.

Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan said if the two governments "make concerted efforts, the visit of President Clinton will be a complete success." But the warm words between Mrs. Albright and Mr. Tang masked continued divisions between the two world powers, with China putting Taiwan at the top of its agenda and the United States listing human rights, trade and non-proliferation as areas of major concern.

"There still remain some unclear areas, and the main one of these is Taiwan," Mr. Tang said.

"This is the most impor-

tant and most sensitive issue in bilateral relations," he added.

Relations between China and the United States spiralled out of control in 1995 when Washington issued a visa to Taiwanese President Lee Tung-hui in a move seen by Beijing as aimed at promoting official independence on the island.

It took two years to put ties back on an even footing, and Chinese President Jiang Zemin's state visit to the United States in October 1997 was the first step in the two nations' "strategic partnership" for the 21st century.

Mr. Clinton's return visit in June is expected to cement ties further and will be the first visit to China by a U.S. president since that of George Bush in early 1989.

Topping Mr. Clinton's agenda will be China's imprisonment of dissidents who peacefully criticise the government, fears over nuclear and chemical proliferation and the growing U.S. deficit with China.

When asked about the lifting of sanctions imposed on China after the June 4, 1989, crackdown on stu-

dents in Tiananmen Square, Mrs. Albright said there was no timetable and the process would be a long one.

She gave no comment about China's human rights record, but Mr. Tang underlined Beijing's intransigence on the issue by saying that exiled dissidents Wei Jingsheng and Wang Dan were still considered criminals by Beijing.

"Wang Dan and Wei Jingsheng have violated Chinese law. They committed crimes," Mr. Tang said in response to a reporter's question.

Both were serving terms for plotting to overthrow the government and were released on medical parole on the condition they went immediately to the United States.

Mrs. Albright flew into a rainy Beijing earlier Wednesday and was scheduled to hold a working lunch with Mr. Tang to discuss issues ranging from non-proliferation to human rights, trade and the environment.

Her 48-hour visit to Beijing is aimed at clearing the way for Mr. Clinton's landmark trip to China in

June.

She will also meet with Vice Premier and former Foreign Minister Qian Qichen. Premier Zhu Rongji and President Jiang Zemin before flying to Seoul early Friday.

According to U.S. officials accompanying her on the tour, Mrs. Albright will focus on nailing down a date for China's already-promised signing of the U.N.'s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

She will also press for the release of more political prisoners and sound out Beijing's political will on early entry to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) — which the Washington has said will require a sweeping changes in its trade policies, they said.

The U.S. cabinet's co-ordinator for Tibet, Greg Craig, is accompanying Mrs. Albright but only in his capacity as director for policy planning, they confirmed.

Beijing protested Washington's decision to create the office last October, describing the move as "interference in China's internal affairs."

S. African clinic hostages released after nearly 24 hours

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — Sixteen staffers at a clinic were released Wednesday after being held hostage for nearly 24 hours by a group that blamed the facility for the death of an infant, SABC radio reported.

Enraged residents of Eldorado Park, south of Johannesburg, locked the staff of the Kiptown Clinic into a room Tuesday to protest the death of six-week-old Raygene Dixon last week.

Police persuaded the protesters to release the hostages early Wednesday.

The group claimed staff at the clinic had turned away Raygene and her mother Friday because they were preparing for the official opening of the clinic, which was to be attended by various dignitaries including President Nelson Mandela.

In the end, Mr. Mandela did not attend. Raygene had been taken to the clinic because she was having trouble breathing. She was dead by the time she arrived by ambulance at another hospital.

Eldorado Park residents demanded a public apology from the president as the clinic had been closed for his impending visit, the head of the protesters, Lola Volmink, told the Sowetan newspaper.

N. Korean leader says contacts between S. and N. Korea important

SEOUL (AFP) — North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Il said in a rare public statement that South and North Koreans should exchange visits and improve relations to pave the way for reunification.

"For the great unity of the nation, all the Koreans in the North, South and abroad must visit one another, hold contacts, promote dialogue and strengthen solidarity," the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) Wednesday quoted Mr. Kim as saying.

The KCNA, monitored here, quoted a long letter by Mr. Kim dated April 18 entitled "Let us reunify the country independently and peacefully through the great unity of the entire nation."

"Promoting wide-ranging visits, contacts, dialogues and solidarity among our compatriots is an important way to achieve the great unity of the nation," Mr. Kim said. "Even though there is difference in ideologies, ideals, political views and religious beliefs within our nation, the fellow countrymen can build up mutual understanding and trust and pool their will and efforts for the common objective of the nation if they all freely travel, hold contacts and dialogues and strengthen solidarity," Mr. Kim said.

The letter was released in Pyongyang last week, on the day that a high-level meeting between South and North Korea broke down in Beijing after the North refused to come up with a specific timetable for the reunion of families separated since the division of the Korean Peninsula in 1945.

The South said it would only offer fertilisers to the North if it agrees to a specific timetable for the reunions.

North Korean experts and government officials here said the letter in general showed no change in North Korea's attitude, but it was still "somewhat meaningful."

"As a whole, there is nothing new in the letter. But it is meaningful at this time since North Korea is calling for dialogue with the South despite collapse of talks in Beijing," a government official told AFP.

"The letter mentions visits between South and North Korean. That is what we want, and it is interesting it was brought up. But the text needs to be studied further," a North Korean watcher here said.

The Beijing talks were the first official government contact in nearly four years between the two Koreas, still technically at war since the 1953-53 Korean war.

South Korea has said it would not beg or force North Korea to return to the negotiating table, but would patiently wait for Pyongyang to come forward.

In his letter, North Korea's Kim said:

"Dialogue between North and South must serve national unity and reunification."

"The dialogue must not be the monopoly of a few men in authority of a particular class or section. It must be a wide-ranging, nationwide dialogue that can pool the opinions of all political parties, groups and social sections."

The new South Korean government under President Kim Dae-jung has spelt out its new policies towards North Korea including pledges not to try to foist a "German-style absorption" on the North and to provide economic help if it officially asks for it and keeps its one-million-strong army at bay.

North Korea's Kim said his country was against South Korea's previous administration "not because they were in power but their policy on dependence on foreign forces, their policy against reunification and their treachery to the country and nation."

But, he added, if South Korea's new government "takes the patriotic stand, the stand of unity in alliance with the north, we will work with them to shape the destiny of the nation."

South and North Korea have remained technically at war since the 1950-53 Korean conflict. An armistice was signed ending the conflict but never a peace agreement.

Nigerian rights groups plead for coup plotters

LAGOS (R) — Nigerian human rights groups pleaded with the country's generals Wednesday to spare the lives of six men sentenced to death for plotting to overthrow military ruler General Sani Abacha.

Gen. Abacha's ruling military council must ratify the sentences on his former deputy, Lieutenant-General Olatipo Diya, and the other five before they can be carried out. Execution for plotting a coup is traditionally by firing squad.

"We hope the death sentences will not be carried out. It will do no good to shed more blood in this country. What we need is reconciliation and a clear political direction," said Olatipo Diya, a spokesman of the Civil Liberties Organisation in Lagos. Other groups echoed the call.

Some Western diplomats said it was likely that their countries would also make some kind of plea for the prisoners.

The six were sentenced Tuesday by a seven-man military tribunal which had been sitting in secret at the central town of Jos since Feb. 14.

Of the other 24 people tried by the panel, four were jailed for life and six given lesser sentences. The rest were set free.

The sentences once again turn the human rights spotlight on the west African country of 104 million that has been under limited international sanctions since the 1995 hanging of author Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others for murder.

Government officials in Abuja said they expected the provisional ruling council would soon meet to ratify the sentences, but said no date or time had yet been fixed.

Western countries have threatened a possible extension of sanctions, though not yet to lifeblood crude oil exports, if

Nigeria does not improve its attitude to human rights and restore a semblance of democracy this year.

They demanded a fair trial for Gen. Diya — who said at his first court appearance that he had been set up.

In his ruling, tribunal chairman Major-General Victor Malu, the respected former commander of the west African ECOMOG peace-keeping force, said Gen. Diya had no defence for having taken part in meetings to plot the overthrow of Gen. Abacha.

"Any officer who was given any information or who was invited to a meeting should report to the authorities of the plot when they were approached by those he claimed initiated it," Gen. Malu said.

Gen. Diya, who like Gen. Abacha is 54, had been seen as a staunch loyalist until his arrest on Dec. 20. After Gen. Abacha seized power in 1993,

Gen. Diya helped bring credibility to the government by convincing some of his Yoruba kinsmen to join in.

It was a time when pundits warned Nigeria could break up after the army's annulment of presidential elections Yoruba millionaire Moshood Abiola was poised to win.

All those sentenced to death were Yorubas from southwestern Nigeria, which has become the heartland of opposition to military rule.

Gen. Abacha is a northerner like most of the soldiers who have ruled Nigeria for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960.

Gen. Abacha is widely expected to stand in presidential elections on Aug. 1 after securing the backing of all five registered parties last week to stand unopposed.

Mr. Abiola has been held among dozens of detainees since declaring himself president in 1994.

Society on the move

Efforts recognised and rewarded

Dr. Kamel Abu Jaber is to be honoured in Alexandria, Egypt in early May for his contributions to the protection of the environment and the conservation of nature. Probably most recognised for his work as a political scientist and his career in public service as Minister of Economy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, as head of the Joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to the 1991 Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid, as a member of the Upper House of Parliament and as head of the Institute of Diplomacy, Dr. Abu Jaber is also a founder of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN). And back in the 80s he was editor of the RSCN's Reem magazine. On May 6, during the 8th International Conference on Environment, to be held in Alexandria, Dr. Abu Jaber will receive the Arab-European Cooperation Centre Award along with nine other Arab personalities from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

TWO HATS: Director General of the Department of Palestinian Affairs Ibrahim Badran has been appointed by the Council of Ministers to take charge of all activities related to refugee affairs in the Kingdom. Dr. Badran, who was only last February appointed to the Palestinian Affairs department, replaces Marwan Dudin in heading the refugee affairs activities for Jordan. He recently returned from a visit to Canada where he headed the Jordanian delegation to the Refugee Working Group of the multilateral track of the peace process which Ottawa is seeking to reactivate.

KEEPING FOLKS MOVING: Mahmoud Hamad Abdullah was elected secretary general of the Arab Union for Transportation (AUT), after a meeting of the AUT council held in Amman last month. Mr. Abdullah, who last December succeeded Marwan Dudin as in charge of the Amman district for the National Constitutional Party, when Mr. Dudin left for its government post as head of the Aqaba Region Authority. Mr. Abdullah has been in the transportation sector most of his career, starting earliest with the Civil Aviation Authority (and working on his masters at the same time) then as an advisor to the minister of transportation. He recently returned from the U.S. where he has been fulfilling requirements towards his Ph.D. in economics. The Arab Union for Transportation works under the umbrella of the Arab Ministers Council for Transportation of the Arab League.

QUICK WORK: The National Electricity Company (NECO) moved swiftly to name an acting director general to take the place vacated by the retirement of Mohammad Said Arafat last week. Wadah Majed Nabulsi was selected from within NECO to take charge of the company as it prepares to split into three entities. Mr. Nabulsi has been with

NECO and its predecessor the Jordan Electricity Authority as assistant secretary general.

WITH THE RANK: Jordan's ambassadors to Libya and Sudan have been in their respective posts for several months. But only last week were they officially promoted in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the rank of ambassador. Now whenever Ahmad Ali Mubeiddin, envoy to Tripoli, and Mohammad Tawfiq Khalidi, envoy to Khartoum, return to home base they will retain the rank of ambassador and no longer minister plenipotentiary.

IN MEMORY: A young engineer who in 1994 published a book about Jordan's Queen Mother has issued a new edition of the book on the occasion of the anniversary of the death of Her Majesty Queen Zein Al Sharaf. Ahmad Ali Muhallab, 28, was born in Kuwait and came to Jordan during the Gulf crisis of 1990-91. He says he became interested in the life and work of Queen Zein after watching the emotional reunion with her son, His Majesty King Hussein, on the steps of her home when the King returned from the U.S. following his successful surgery in 1992. Mr. Muhallab's latest work, which he published in 1997, contains a biography of the late Queen, her achievements in humanitarian work, and the last letter she wrote to King Hussein. The 247-page illustrated publication also contains copies of the numerous letters of condolence sent to the Hashemite family from notables from around the Kingdom upon Queen Zein's passing on April 26, 1994. In Arabic, the book, entitled, *Um Al Hussein*, is available from Mr. Muhallab directly at 743-567.

CAVIAR? If anyone noticed the advertisement placed in the Arabic dailies by Royal Jordanian announcing that it is recruiting women flight attendants trainees who can speak English and Farsi, you guessed it, RJ is planning to resume its flights to Tehran in early June.

ELECTIONS: European university alumni make the news again. This time it was the French University Alumni in Jordan which elected its new general council: Dr. Sami Sharif, president; Dr. Jamil Abu Ahmad, vice president; Mohammad Anab, secretary general; Bassam Abu Selem, treasurer; and Aid Makhadme, Dr. Abdullah Qudah, and Dr. Michel Dababneh as members.

AND MORE ELECTIONS: In Zarqa the Chechen Society has elected Abdul Baqi Jammo as president of the administrative council, and the Circassian Society has



Models take to the runway Wednesday at the fashion and jewellery show by designers Rizwan Beyg and Amina Hassan Ali of Pakistan

elected Ghazi Balqar as president of its administrative council. The Chechen council members elected last week were Khalil Sander, vice president, Abdullah Haddad, secretary general, Amin Kheir, treasurer, and Mohammad Issa, Amer Youssef Arslan, Nabil Kamel Ahmad Nadhmi, Ahmad Bino, Mahmoud Bino, Mohammad Zuheir Taher, Kheireddin Dawhleh, and Shaker Shafiq as members. The Circassian Society elected Ihsan Shabsou, secretary general, Mohammad Zaki Hajjari, treasurer, Amer Ramzi, Awni Bakir, Mohammad Abdul Rahman, Nibal Ahmad Khaled Yahyah, and Houriya Daden as members.

SILKS AND SILVER: If you were not among the 175

people to attend Wednesday's fashion show featuring the "must have" day and evening wear of Pakistani designer Rizwan Beyg, and the glittering jewellery of Amina Hassan Ali, there's still today (Thursday). The designs of both designers will be on display all day at the Marriott Hotel. Wednesday's show, organised by the Pakistani Women's Association, was attended by association patron HRH Princess Sarvath, and Their Royal Highnesses Princess Rahma and Princess Alia Faisal, Ruweida Tarawneh, wife of Royal Court Chief Dr. Faye, Tarawneh, and Mrs. Talal Hassan, wife of the minister of culture. According to PWA President Maria Khan, all proceeds from sales at the events will go to the Young Muslim Women's Association charitable projects. Mr. Beyg and Ms. Ali, who are in Jordan for the show, will return to Pakistan on Friday.

AN AMERICAN FIRST: Starting in May the American Center of the U.S. Embassy will present its first American Arts Festival. To be inaugurated by Her Majesty Queen Noor on May 10, the festival is meant to combine the talents of both American and Jordanian artists, says U.S. Counsellor for Press and Cultural Affairs Marcelle Wahba. The participating American artists, jewellery designer Suzanne El Masry, and classical guitarist Jad Azkoul, are, obviously, of Arab origin. The other participating artists are sculptor Samer Tabbaa, oudist Sakher Hanar, and Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi, founder and curator of the International Council on Women in the Arts. Opening Day, May 10, will feature exhibitions of Egyptian-born Ms. Masry's jewellery, and Saudi Arabian-born Mr. Tabbaa's sculptures, both displayed under the theme, "Sculptured Designs." The exhibitions will open at 6:00 p.m. at the American Center Exhibit Halls and remain on display through May 25. In addition, on May 13, Ms. Masry will conduct a workshop on "New Jewellery Design Techniques" with the Dana Nature Reserve Project of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature. As all the festival events are open to the public free of charge, it's advisable to reserve your seats for a classical guitar evening May 11 with Jad Azkoul whose programme is to include pieces by Villa-Lobos, Abel Carlevaro, Antonio Lauro, and Laourival Silvestre. The concert will take place in the American Center courtyard. Mr. Azkoul will also conduct a workshop at the National Music Conservatory on May 12 from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Many will remember the highly acclaimed exhibition, "Forces of Change: Women Artists of the Arab World," organised by Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi and which toured the U.S. for two years. On May 12 in the AC auditorium, Ms. Nashashibi will lecture at 6:00 p.m. on "The Politics of Identity: Contemporary Arab Art in the U.S." And on May 13, "East Meets West" when Jad Azkoul teams up with oudist Sakher Hanar for a concert in the courtyard at 7:00 p.m. Again seat reservations are advisable for this concert. (Tel. 592-0101, ext. 2579.)

Jennifer Hamarneh

Rx for headaches

By Jean-Claude Elias

DEALING WITH personal computers is like dealing with life itself - it's nothing but headaches. At the same time they are becoming more powerful than ever in terms of processing power, data storage and possibilities. PCs are bringing us a huge load of problems.

Whereas the hardware has its share of annoyances with its extra sensitivity to power imperfections and random failures, it remains far less problematic than software. Indeed, in spite of the complexity of the CPU (the central processing unit, the core of every PC) and the other electronic devices inside a computer they are still under better control than the hyper-sophisticated operating systems like MS-Windows and some of its application programmes.

On a regular basis, users have to confront issues like computer viruses, programmes re-installation and un-installation, erroneous installations, sudden system crash, incompatibility of devices, hard disk fragmentation and so forth. The industry's answer is a series of software modules designed to reduce the headache that could result from any of the above cases.

The best-known type of PC medicine is the virus scanner. Norton Anti Virus, McAfee VirusScan and the evocative Pcillin are the most commonly found. Cleansweep and Uninstall let users safely remove installed programmes they do not wish to use anymore, without damaging Windows. For one is not supposed to remove an application that runs under Windows by simply erasing (deleting) it from

the hard disk.

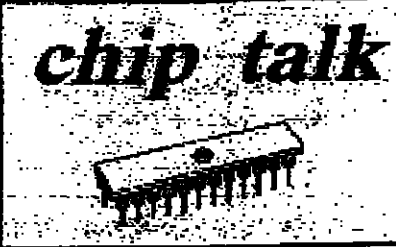
Other pieces of preventive or curative PC medicine are appropriately called Dr. Watson, First Aid or Nuts and Bolts. They aim to prevent problems before they occur or to repair damaged pieces of software.

Using them however is not an amateur's work. First Aid particularly has proven to be difficult to use though it is a good addition to Windows 95. The irony is that all the above goodies are but programmes! They can generate errors and system crash just like the software they are designed to protect or fix. Worse than the potential hazard they represent, using them in an erroneous way can lead to real disasters. Apart from the well-known virus scanners that can be operated by any user, computer professionals recommend the utmost care when

running software like Uninstall or First Aid. Cases where Cleansweep,

supposed to remove only the programme you would tell it to uninstall, has also deleted essential Windows files are common. The error often is caused by the user's lack of technical knowledge and not by flaws in the software itself. Other consequences of wrong usage of PC medicine range from loss of data to the complete failure to work of the computer.

Cleansweep, Nuts and Bolts, Dr. Watson and the like are truly like drugs. They can be very efficient but should be used carefully and not without a good reason. And although some of them have become as ordinary as aspirin, I wish their manufacturers would tag them with the "keep out of reach of children" warning.



Iranian prisoner of war 'returns from the dead'

By Julian Borger

EIGHTEEN YEARS after his jet fighter disappeared over Iraq, Hossein Lashkari has returned from the dead.

Iraq had kept his existence a secret and his comrades had given him up as lost. But the Iranian pilot survived torture and more than a decade in solitary confinement to emerge as a reminder of one of this century's most brutal wars.

His release this month, 10 years after the Iran-Iraq conflict ended, was part of a prisoner exchange motivated by both countries' need to emerge from regional isolation. In recent weeks Iran has freed more than 5,000 Iraqis. In return Saddam Hussein, who long claimed to hold no Iranian prisoners of war, produced Flight Lieutenant Lashkari and 318 other Iranian POWs.

In an interview at a Tehran Air-Force Base, the pilot, aged 45 and promoted to the rank of general since his release, said he had been subjected to physical and mental torture and kept in isolation for 10 years in a string of Baghdad villas converted into dungeons. He was the ace up President Saddam's sleeve, a hostage to be used only when necessary.

In 1980, soon after the Iran-Iraq war began, his F4 fighter caught fire during a sortie and he ejected. "I'm not sure if I was hit or what caused the fire. I was fly-

ing low and the parachute opened not long before I hit the ground, so I came down hard and passed out. When I came to, Iraqi doctors were stitching up my mouth," Gen. Lashkari said.

The Iraqis removed his bed and forced the wounded pilot to stand during interrogations. After 48 hours he was taken to Iraqi intelligence headquarters in Baghdad and the professionals got to work on him. "They attached metal brushes to sensitive parts of my anatomy and gave me electric shocks. They beat the soles of my feet - 100 or 120 strokes until I passed out."

"And then there was psychological torture as well. They would come to my cell 30 or 40 times a night, just to ask me my name and number. They also blindfolded me and tied me up and drove me out of Baghdad at night. They took me off the road and fired into the air above my head."

He was asked for information his interrogators could have found in the international press. He now believes his torturers were more interested in testing their techniques and assessing his resistance and training. Released Iraqi prisoners have also alleged maltreatment and torture in captivity in Iran.

A million soldiers are thought to have died in the inconclusive eight-year war. After the 1988 ceasefire, mutual distrust

remained intense. About 70,000 prisoners were sent home in 1990 but many more were held back as bargaining counters. Talks are under way to exchange the last POWs, but no one seems sure how many there are.

After the war ended, Gen. Lashkari's conditions worsened. After eight years sharing a cell with other Iranians, he was moved on his own to a series of houses in Baghdad. "From the outside these places looked like expensive villas. Inside there were manacles and bars on the windows," Gen. Lashkari said.

He spent the next 10 years in solitary, exchanging the odd word with Iraqi guards. As the years went by, he overheard only fragments of news - about the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the Gulf war he could hear the bombs falling. The Iraqis told the Red Cross of his existence only in 1996.

Gen. Lashkari says he owes his sanity to his Islamic faith and to the order he imposed on his life.

"I allotted every task a certain time so that I ended up feeling I needed an extra two hours in every 24," he said.

This feat of self-discipline has left the grey-bearded pilot withdrawn and deadpan. When he first telephoned his wife, Havva, from a hotel on the border, he greeted her formally. "Do you recognise

my voice?" he asked. Havva broke down in tears.

The family was reunited three weeks ago in front of a scrum of dignitaries, well-wishers and television cameras. When Hossein and Havva finally found each other, they shook hands and exchanged formal pleasantries. As he embraced his son Ali (whom he had last seen as a three-month-old infant), his first words to the young man were: "Why are you wearing glasses?" He admitted later: "It was all I could think of saying."

As Iran's longest-serving POW, Gen. Lashkari has been proclaimed its foremost national hero. He has been filmed at national shrines and listening intently to the ayatollahs. Havva has been declared an Exemplary Wife. Their home life has been subjected to relentless media scrutiny.

When the young flight lieutenant last saw Iran in 1980, the revolution was only a few months old. It is now riven with disputes and riddled with corruption. As is to be expected, every faction has attempted to identify itself with the airman. "Little wonder," said one embittered war veteran watching the pilot-hero eulogised for the umpteenth time on television. "He is everything the revolution was supposed to be and so obviously has not become."

- The Guardian

Sahara tribe first to reach for the stars

By Tim Radford

STONE AGE people built the first astronomical observatory centuries before anyone thought. Scientists working in the Sahara have identified a series of megaliths that predate Stonehenge in Britain and other sites by more than 1,000 years.

Around 6,500 years ago an unknown people living in Nabta, in southern Egypt, began dragging slabs of stone, nearly 3 metres high, into position on the west bank of the Nile.

The alignments run north-south and east-west, and point to the sun where astronomers estimate its solstice would have been 6,000 years ago.

"This is the oldest documented astronomical alignment of megaliths in the world," says Professor McKim Malville of the University of Colorado at

Boulder, who - with colleagues from the United States, Egypt and Poland - has completed a satellite survey of the stones. "A lot of effort went into the construction of a purely symbolic and ceremonial site."

The ruins are beside what would have been the shoreline of a lake that filled with water about 11,000 years ago when the African monsoon moved north. It was used by nomads until 4,800 years ago, when the rainfall patterns shifted, and the area became arid and uninhabitable.

Five alignments radiate out from a central collection of stones. Beneath one was a carved rock resembling a cow standing upright.

The researchers report that they found the remains of several buried cattle, including a skeleton laid to rest in a clay-

lined chamber. There were cinders from ancient hearths, and fragments of decorated ostrich

The stones are mute evidence of a vanished world - and a foretaste of the pyramid builders who would arrive 1,500 or 2,000 years later.

eggs. The stones are mute evidence of a vanished world - and a foretaste of the pyramid

builders who would arrive 1,500 or 2,000 years later. Neolithic herdsman came to Nabta, probably from further south in Africa, and used cattle in their rituals just as Masai tribesmen do today, says Prof. Malville.

Because Nabta was close to the Tropic of Cancer, the noon sun would be directly overhead and for a brief while each day, the standing stones would cast no shadows.

"These vertical sighting stones correspond to the zenith sun during the summer solstice," he says. "For many cultures in the tropics, the zenith sun has been a major event for millennia."

Some of the other alignments are still puzzling the archaeo-astronomers - scientists who specialise in interpreting patterns in stone left by vanished civilisations. Some of the

monoliths would probably have been submerged in the lake and may have "marked" the onset of the rainy season. "The organisation of these objects suggest a symbolic geometry that integrated death, water and the sun," says Prof. Malville.

The discovery points to a world peopled by nomadic herdsman prepared to face daunting conditions.

The "high" culture of the Egyptians is traditionally thought to have been borrowed from Mesopotamia and Syria. But the forgotten stonemasons of Nabta clearly understood symbolism: Prof. Malville and his colleagues believe that they, rather than the Assyrians or the Babylonians, may have triggered the social complexity that ended in the pyramids of the Pharaohs.

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Jordan Islamic Bank adds newly posted lower profit to retained earnings

**** THE JORDAN Islamic Bank** posted a JD3.15 million net profit last year compared to JD5.60 million recorded in 1996. However, the bank will transfer the profit to retained earnings because it awarded the shareholders a free quarter share bonus for each share held by them and floated shares for private subscription at par value without an "issuance premium" surcharge. "This should compensate and even be higher than distributing cash dividends," the bank said.

According to the annual report, the bank's total assets at the end of last year amounted to JD650.62 million compared to JD618.66 million at the end of 1996. Off-balance items such as letters of credits, guarantees and acceptances totalled JD24.69 million (JD40.11 million in 1996). Cash in hand and at banks increased from JD135.34 million at the end of 1996 to JD162.76 million at the end of 1997.

Other figures showed total financing and investments totalling JD461.87 million compared to JD457.95 million at the end of 1996. Various types of deposits were higher by JD27.36 million as they increased from JD524.54 million to JD551.90 million.

The report indicated that the bank extended low-interest credits that benefited 7,644 persons. The balance of these soft loans has increased from JD1.66 million at the end of 1996 to JD2.03 million at the end of 1997. The total of net fixed assets increased by about half a million to reach JD15.47 million.

Board Chairman Mohammad Hasoubeh told the shareholders that the bank's future plan aims at continuing to widen and to diversify banking services and at consolidating the expansion in financing craftsmen and small industries. The bank also will stress dealing in bonds by continuously issuing investment portfolios and diversifying the investment components of these portfolios.

Mr. Hasoubeh highlighted in his address that among many financing deals, the bank extended a JD7 million financing to the National Electricity Company. He pointed out that the share of the Jordan Islamic Bank of the total financing of all the banks in Jordan was around 9.11 per cent. He said the shareholders' equity has risen to JD49.6 million with the capital adequacy ratio standing at 15.26 per cent which is a level higher than the 12 per cent ratio required by the Central Bank (Al Ra'i + Al Aswaq).

Economic slump good news for some in Japan

TOKYO (AFP) — Japan's economic slump has turned up some unlikely pickings for canny entrepreneurs who can even provide a fake job for those embarrassed about unemployment.

Manufacturers of safes are also enjoying a boom as people lose faith in shaky banks.

And temporary job agencies are giving new flexibility to corporations that are no longer willing to risk giving permanent employment to incompetent graduates.

Eiichi Seki, president of Create Corp., has found a new niche for his 15-year-old business, which provides clients with the illusion of having their own office.

Pay your subscription, and Create Corp. can help you to fool family and friends into believing you still have a job weeks after your boss has fired you.

While you lounge around in the bar, telephone operators of Create Corp. will take calls meant for you and explain that you've just popped out and will call them back.

Most of Seki's longer-term customers are industrious entrepreneurs who want to save the cost of an office and still re-

sure clients in Japan, where people place more trust in organisations than individuals.

Young women working in the sex industry account for a small proportion of the clientele.

But "an increasing number of senior men who have been laid off are becoming our customers," Seki said, as the jobless executives want to fool their families and acquaintances.

When calls come in, a Create Corp. operator, posing as your fake company's secretary, will contact you later on your mobile telephone or wherever else you desire and inform you of your incoming messages.

A basic contract to provide you with an illusory employer's telephone number is 20,000 yen (\$155) a month.

"We issue pay slips if the customer deposits and withdraws his own money," Seki said. "I can meet any request of my customers as far as they don't violate the law."

And there's no need to worry about operators getting mixed up on the story by confusing you with another client — the right script pops up on a tiny screen in the telephone machine whenever it rings.

Create Corp. can handle hundreds of numbers with only three telephone machines, as a computer connected to them recognises incoming calls, specifies the correct answers and feeds them to idle lines.

Seki operates six-to-seven of some 500 such offices in Tokyo and serves 1,000 people.

The crisis in Japan's financial sector has also provided a business opening as many people choose to keep their cash in a safe at home rather than at shaky banks which in any case pay hardly any interest.

"Orders are outpacing production thanks to these 'closet deposits'," said Hiroshi Doi at the nation's largest home safe manufacturer, King Industrial Co. Ltd.

"We saw orders picking up unexpectedly after Hokkaido Bank Ltd. failed in mid-November," he said. Hokkaido was the first of Japan's top 10 banks to go under since World War II.

The spectacular fall of the country's fourth-largest broker, Yamaichi Securities Co. Ltd., in late November last year, added further fuel to the demand for safes.

King's monthly production stands at 15,000 money boxes a month, up

Workshop opens on advanced banking techniques

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordanian exports have grown by almost 10 per cent over the past five years, Mohammad Halaiqah, the secretary general of the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the deputy chairman of the board of directors of the Jordan Export Development Corporation (JEDCO), said Wednesday.

Addressing the opening session of a workshop on export finance and credit guarantees in Jordan, Dr. Halaiqah said Jordanian exports have reached 107 world markets in 1997.

Farouq Al Hadidi, the acting director general of JEDCO said the workshop aims to brief exporters on the finance and credit guarantee programme available to Jordanian exporters noting that demand for such a programme is still below the expectations.

Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) expert Mohammad Quteish reviewed the general conditions for giving advances to licensed banks against export letters of credit and other technical banking procedures.

Golda Amis, advisor for the Investment Financing Programme, said the government had signed a \$40 million agreement with the World Bank to finance this activity. She noted that the CBJ will relend the total amount through several licensed banks in Jordan, which have agreed to participate in the relending process in accordance with certain conditions.

Egypt, U.S. and Japan set up first private sector petrochemicals firm

CAIRO (AFP) — An Egyptian private-sector group has signed an agreement with U.S. and Japanese petrochemical giants for the construction of a \$445 million petrochemical complex, the oil ministry has said.

The deal was signed between Egypt's Sharqiya Company for Petroleum, Union Carbide of the United States and Japan's Toyo company, a spokesman for the oil ministry said.

It stipulated the creation of Egypt's "first private-sector petrochemical complex" for total investments worth 1.5 billion pounds (\$445 million), said the spokesman who was unable to give each company's share of the deal.

The new firm will produce 120,000 tonnes of polypropylene each year worth 375 million pounds (\$125 million).

REUTERS REUTERS The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.7822	0.5985	1.4926	151.58	1.4369	1771.80	2.0192	6.0136
DE Mark	0.5580	-	0.3338	0.8328	73.54	0.8015	987.85	1.2580	3.3538
GB Sterling	1.5708	2.9966	-	2.4951	220.43	2.4008	2960.68	3.3741	10.0486
CH Franc	0.6700	120.00	0.4004	-	88.35	0.9626	1185.79	135.14	4.0248
JP Yen	0.0078	1.3583	0.4533	1.1310	-	1.0889	13.42	152.91	4.5829
CA Dollar	0.6859	1.2916	0.4225	1.0556	1.09	-	1270.80	1.4551	4.3285
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0147	0.3376	0.0842	1344.81	0.8112	-	11.38	3.3914
NL Guilder	0.4962	88.78	0.2963	73.94	66.32	0.7120	876.99	-	2.9767
FR Franc	0.1663	0.2982	0.0995	24.8208	21.83	0.2391	33.66	33.5600	-


Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	-	0.7090	3.7502	0.3770	3.6403	0.3054	3.6728	1518.00	3.4180
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-	5.2894	0.5317	5.1344	0.4307	5.1803	2141.04	4.8209
Saudi Riyal	0.2667	0.1891	-	0.1005	0.37	0.0814	0.38	404.78	0.9114
Bahrain Dinar	2.86	1.9807	9.9480	-	5.66	0.8101	8.74	4026.74	9.0688
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1948	1.0302	1.0302	-	0.0639	1.01	417.00	0.9389
Kuwait Dinar	3.2744	2.3216	12.2796	1.2344	11.92	-	12.03	4970.63	0.9389
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0211	1.0208	0.9912	0.0832	-	413.31	0.9306
Lebanese/1000	0.66	0.4671	2.4706	0.2483	2.3981	0.2012	2.4195	-	2.2516
Egyptian	0.2926	0.2074	1.0972	0.1103	1.0680	0.0894	1.0745	444.12	-

Energy									
Oils	Last	Low	High	Period	1-4	3-5	6-7	8-9	1-1
Brent	14.20	14.21	-	Cncy	Month	Months	Months	Year	
W. Texas	15.80	15.86	-	USD	6.6875	6.7556	6.8672	6.0234	
Bonny	14.20	14.21	-	GBP	7.4219	7.4792	7.4531	7.4323	
Dubai	12.73	12.58	-	JPY	0.8354	0.7083	0.7500	0.7708	
UL Gas	156.00	155.00	-	DEM	3.6561	3.7582	3.8563	4.0374	
				FRF	3.6313	1.6250	1.7578	1.9453	
				CHF	1.5000	3.6211	3.7324	3.9512	
				ITL	5.4290	5.1400	4.8480	-	

Metal Prices									
Metal	Bid	Offer	Period	1-4	3-5	6-7	8-9	1-1	
Gold (oz's)	308.5	310	Cncy	Month	Months	Months	Year		
Silver (oz's)	6.19	6.22	USD	6.6875	6.7556	6.8672	6.0234		
Platinum (oz's)	403	405	GBP	7.4219	7.4792	7.4531	7.4323		
AL (3 Months)	1489	1471	JPY	0.8354	0.7083	0.7500	0.7708		
CU (3 Months)	1878	1882	DEM	3.6561	3.7582	3.8563	4.0374		
Zinc (3 Months)	1113	1115	FRF	3.6313	1.6250	1.7578	1.9453		
Lead (3 Months)	566	568	CHF	1.5000	3.6211	3.7324	3.9512		
NI (3 Months)	5585	5585	ITL	5.4290	5.1400	4.8480	-		

Main Equity Indices									
Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cls		
New York	DOW JONES	8932.84	33.88	0.38	8954.01	8899.21	8898.96		
New York	S&P 500	1089.43	4.32	0.4	1091.21	1084.65	1085.11		
London	FT-SE 100	6794	-12.6	-0.22	6838.7	6774.4	6806.8		
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	16355.43	-254.52	-1.53	16625.4	15334.5	15690		
Paris	CAC 40	3733.93	-43.3	-1.15	3780.25	3709.37	3777.23		
Frankfurt	DAX	5108.48	89.81	1.75	5154.88	5086.84	5018.67		

Energy									
Commodity	Last	Delivery	JOD Cross Rates						
Coffee (c/lbs)	139.68	Spot	USD	0.708	0.710				
Cocoa (\$/ton)	1988	Spot	GB Sterling	1.1781	1.184				
Sugar (\$/ton)	280.2	Spot	DE Mark	0.3941	0.3951				
Wheat (\$/ton)	91	Spot	CH Franc	0.4736	0.476				
Soya (c/lbs)	28.42	Spot	FR Franc	0.1176	0.1182				
Tea (c/lbs)	140	Spot	JP Yen	0.5348	0.5376				
Barley (\$/bsh)	0	Spot	NL Guilder	0.3604	0.3622				
Rice (\$/ton)	410	Spot	IT Lira	0.399	0.401				

JORDAN FINANCIAL MARKET										
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - JERUSALEM										
TELEPHONE: 60711 / 60719										
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 29/04/1998										
										
PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	PAST 12 MONTHS LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV. %	NO. OF SHARES	NO. OF TRANS.	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE
355.500	251.000	ARAB BANK	14.3	1.14	23	2940	1026410	350.00	350.00	-
2.340	1.660	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	14.1	4.05	19	108500	184456	1.68	1.73	0.05
S 3.540	1.250	BANK OF JORDAN	4.2	0.00	1	150	201	1.34	1.34	-
1.300	0.890	MID.EAST INV.BK.	60.4	0.00	1	150	138	0.95	0.92	-0.03
+S 2.680	1.610	INDUSTRIAL DEV.BK.	8.2	8.81	3	7377	2781	1.61	1.60	-0.01
T 5.990	4.660	THE HOUSING BK.	19.1	3.32	37	20000	120044	5.89	6.03	0.14
4.180	1.790	JOR. INVEST. BANK	9	0.00	4	1290	2352	1.82	1.83	0.01
T 920	590	JOR. GULF BANK	4.0	10.45	2	1500	1005	0.67	0.67	-
S 4.020	1.750	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	15.5	0.00	10	2707	4962	1.83	1.83	-
1.400	0.800	SECT. AL-NAL (SEITRA)	4.0	0.00	1	150	123	0.81	0.82	0.01
BANK SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 245.85	%CHG: +0.42	105	139284	1342863			
S 1.350	0.900	ARABIAN SEAS INSUR.	54.9	0.00	1	250	250	1.00	1.00	-
INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 121.64	%CHG: 0.00	2	267	284			
2.240	1.550	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	10.3	5.21	23	9113	19203	2.10	2.11	0.01
5.500	2.450	HUNER MINERALS	51.9	0.00	3	7134	33720	4.81	4.74	-0.23
1.550	0.970	NATL. PORTFOLIO	41.1	0.00	10	4900	5047	1.03	1.03	-
1.590	0.360	JORDAN INTL. TRAD.	9	0.00	3	1300	488	0.37	0.36	-0.01
+ 1.480	1.120	MID. EAST TRADING	9	0.00	1	1500	1665	1.14	1.13	-0.02
4.600	2.890	ARAB INTL. INV. EDUC.	9.9	2.00	2	700	2800	4.05	4.00	-0.05
1.090	0.900	ZAKKA EDUCATION	16.2	0.00	1	1500	1380	0.93	0.92	-0.01
1.830	1.450	UNIFIED CO.	6.7	7.24	17	6700	10106	1.50	1.52	0.02
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 115.96	%CHG: -0.25	60	32827	74389			
+ 4.450	2.600	JOR. CREDIT FAC.	14.8	4.40	16	5837	14698	2.60	2.50	-0.10
+ 11.250	9.200	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.7	8.08	14	8382	92035	11.05	11.00	-0.05
1.460	1.040	WOOLAN INDUSTRIES	11.7	6.80	3	150	220	1.45	1.47	0.02
3.400	2.220	ARAB SEAS TRST.	20.6	8.99	3	97	268	2.80	2.78	-0.02
1.370	0.400	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	16.2	0.00	2	90	42	0.48	0.48	-
1.110	0.670	ARAB PAPER COV. TRD.	22.3	0.00	1	1500	1095	0.76	0.73	-0.03
0.620	0.510	NATIONAL INDS.	9	0.00	3	1523	622	0.54	0.54	-
1.760	0.370	INTERMED. FINANC. CHM.	9	0.00	3	1650	646	0.40	0.40	-
S 3.000	0.920	NATL. CABLE WIRE. PWR.	27.2	0.00	9	5400	6093	1.16	1.13	-0.02
1.730	0.510	JOR. SULPHUR CHM.	11.4	0.00	4	1250	780	0.60	0.60	-
1.560	1.150	ARAB FRANK. CHM.	14.7	4.51	10	6091	8115	1.35	1.33	-0.02
S 1.540	0.810	UNIV. HOLD. INDS.	13.6	7.06	24	7800	6633	0.86	0.85	-0.01
1.200	0.680	JOR. INDS. RESOURCES	9.3	14.49	4	1750	1191	0.68	0.69	0.01
1.620	1.350	NATL. CHLORIDE	9.5	7.41	2	1000	1350	1.40	1.35	-0.05
1.080	0.810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	12.3	11.49	12	8050	7004	0.87	0.87	-
1.790	1.290	EL -RAY READY WEAR	47.9	0.00	9	4700	6392	1.37	1.36	-0.01
1.310	1.080	INTL. TOBACCO	7.3	5.60	13	2000	23755	1.23	1.25	0.02
1.120	0.860	UNION CH. & WEG.	11.1	0.00	12	1840	17621	1.10	1.11	0.01
0.860	0.600	JORDAN STEEL	8.3	9.46	5	9100	5254	0.74	0.74	-
0.700	0.570	MID.EAST COMPLEX	10.7	0.00	8	13350	7877	0.60	0.59	-0.01
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 106.77	%CHG: -0.65	160	110865	201996			
GRAND TOTAL			INDEX: 170.32	%CHG: +0.03	327	283243	1619532			
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 29/04/1998										
N 1.090	0.910	EXPORT & FIN. BKK. 75%	17.0	0.00	6	10000	6763	0.92	0.92	-
0.530	0.340	JOR. TRADE FAC.	9	0.00	3	14500	5945	0.41	0.41	-
0.620	0.360	ARAB FIN. INVEST.	9	0.00	3	22000	9020	0.42	0.41	-0.01
1.010	0.720	AL-SHAQD INV. CO.	9	0.00	4	25000	25000	1.00	1.00	-
1.610	0.780	AG-DARTLINE	38.0	0.00	5	3200	2153	0.66	0.65	-0.01
N 2.220	1.050	CENTURY INV. GROUP	9	0.00	1	250	405	1.71	1.62	-0.09
+ 1.000	0.850	ARABIAN JOR. INVEST. CO.	17.0	0.00	2	1000	963	0.95	1.00	0.05
0.400	0.270	UNIVL. WEZELCO	9	0.00	1	100	54	0.57	0.54	-0.03
0.470	0.240	ARAB INTL. INV. TRD.	39.2	0.00	4	15000	8120	0.57	0.54	-0.03
0.650	0.360	NATL. MULT. ENT. MANCO	9	0.00	11	40280	14893	0.37	0.37	-
0.690	0.580	MIDWEST PHARM. 90%	9	0.00	7	2850	925	0.66	0.65	-0.01
0.540	0.330	RAIZ PHARM.	8	0.00	1	7000	4930	0.31	0.30	-0.01
N 0.710	0.500	ADVANCED PHARMA. IND.	9	0.00	6	9500	5955	0.64	0.63	-0.01
0.950	0.430	NATL. POLYMER	9	0.00	46	88944	4487	0.54	0.57	0.03
0.750	0.470	OFFICIALS TRAINING 75%	12.0	0.00	2	3000	1000	0.58	0.58	-
N 1.000	0.750	KIBRA PRINT CO. 75%	12.5	9.24	7	6800	3877	0.83	0.82	-0.01
GRAND TOTAL					109	242494	133509			

Premier League Clubs discuss JFA proposal before 3rd week begins Friday

By Aileen Bannayan
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The third week of the Premier League Championship is scheduled to start Friday unless seven of the ten teams who meet today decide to boycott the competition which kicked off April 20.

Except for Al Wihdat, Shabab Al Hussein and Al Jazireh, the remaining clubs sent the Jordan Football Association (JFA) a memorandum requesting a change in the formula of revenue from ticket sales allocation.

The JFA hopes to resolve the issue this week before the clubs proceed with their threat of pulling out of the competition unless their demands are met.

Ten matches of the prestigious soccer competition — the second of four titles up for grabs this year — are already over with last year's third placed Al Hussein the biggest upset loser 1-0 to Al Jazireh and 3-0 to Al Faisali. Al Faisali beat Al Ramtha 3-1.

In the upcoming week, Al Ahli face Al Faisali Friday and Al Ramtha face Irbid rivals Al Hussein Saturday in the most heated of the five matches.

Titleholders Al Wihdat lead the standings after 3-0 win over Al Arabi and 4-2 win over Shabab Al Hussein.

Al Wihdat took the first of the year's titles when they won the season-opening Cup Winners' Cup after a 4-2 win over Al Ramtha.

It was Al Wihdat's fourth Cup Winners' Cup trophy

after winning in 1989, 1992 and 1997. The match traditionally groups the Premier League and Jordan Cup champions of the preceding year.

Since Al Wihdat won the 1997 Premier League and Jordan Cup titles, their opponents were Jordan Cup runners-up Al Ramtha whose last major title was the 1996 Federation Shield.

Al Wihdat are this year looking for their 5th consecutive Premier League title, having also won the Jordan Cup and Cup Winners Cup

in the past two years.

The Jordan Cup is scheduled for mid-June and will group 40 teams representing the Premier League as well as the first and second divisions.

The competition will be held on a knockout basis with most of the Premier League teams having first round byes.

The fourth major event of the season will be the Federation Shield, grouping the Premier League only and also played on a knockout basis in mid-July.

STANDINGS AFTER 2ND WEEK

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Wihdat	2	2	-	-	7	2	6
Faisali	2	2	-	-	6	1	6
Jazireh	2	1	1	-	1	-	4
Qadissieh	2	-	2	-	2	2	2
Kufroum	2	-	-	-	1	1	2
Ahli	2	-	2	-	-	-	2
S. Al Hussein	2	-	1	1	3	5	1
Ramtha	2	-	1	1	2	4	1
Arabi	2	-	1	1	1	4	1
Hussein	2	-	-	2	-	4	-

Agassi beats Woodbridge to advance

MUNICH (AFP) — Andre Agassi braved wintry temperatures on Tuesday to maintain his perfect record over Todd Woodbridge with a 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 battling win into the second round of the \$525,000 BMW Open.

Agassi, who grew up in the sweltering desert town of Las Vegas, ignored the chilly German weather as he carved out the victory, his second on clay this spring, in one hour, 33 minutes.

The match, which did not end until nearly 7 p.m., meant that Briton Greg Rusedski did not get on court.

Due to fading light, the top seed's first-round contest against German Oliver Gross was put off until midday on Wednesday.

Agassi lost his first career set to Woodbridge, but pulled together in the third to advance.

"It was tough out there today," said the American, who received advice from Brad Gilbert as part of an ATP Tour experiment with on-court coaching.

"After the first set we felt I was only keeping the ball in play, just getting the job done. In the second set he stepped it up and I wasn't prepared."

"I had to raise my game and hit the big shots to win in the third."

After an effortless first set, the going got tougher. Agassi lost serve for 1-2 but immediately broke back.

But a loose backhand return to lose the seventh game put the American into trouble again, 3-4 in the late afternoon with the light starting to fade.

Woodbridge increased the pressure a notch and broke through to win the first set out of 11 he has played against Agassi, forcing the match into a final set which he took easily enough 6-3.

The win was eighth-seeded Agassi's fifth against his Australian opponent.

Agassi is playing Munich for the first time as he makes a determined effort to prepare suitably for the French Open, where he reached the final in 1990 and 1991.

His comeback which began late last year as he sunk into the ranking 140s



Andre Agassi

has already paid dividends, giving the former World No. 1 a ranking of 20th this week on the ATP Tour list, his best since March, 1997.

"My clay form just keeps getting better and better, that's all to the good," said Agassi. "But I need more matches."

Agassi's next opponent will be German Rainer Schuttler, who upset Woodbridge's doubles partner Mark Woodforde 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) to advance into the second round.

German hope Tommy Haas meanwhile faced near-certain defeat standing a set and 1-4 down to Swiss Marc Rosset in their first-ever meeting.

But the 33rd-ranked Haas from Hamburg pulled through to level at a set each after saving four match points and then forced a

tiebreaker against the unseeded former Olympic champion from Geneva.

Haas continued his challenge in the third set but was unable to complete the victory as Rosset hung onto an early break to earn a 6-3, 6-7 (2/7), 6-4 win.

The 1997 Munich semifinalist next plays seventh seed Thomas Enqvist of Sweden, who ousted compatriot Magnus Norman 7-5, 6-3 in a repeat of a win at Stockholm last November.

Second seed Jonas Bjorkman joined Enqvist as a Swedish winner on a day when it felt more like northern Scandinavia than southern Bavaria at the end of April.

World No. 4 Bjorkman continued to show steady improvement after fighting off a virus which has plagued him for nearly two

months and which had limited him to a single victory (at the Lipton Championships) during his past five tournaments on the ATP Tour.

The Swede moved into the second round at the Iphitos club with a fightback, 2-6, 6-4, 6-0 over Andre Medvedev of the Ukraine.

Bjorkman wore a t-shirt and jumper while Medvedev played in long sweatpants as spring weather turned wet and wintry after a mild start to the week.

Bjorkman next plays Belgian Christophe Van Garre, who beat Brett Steven of New Zealand 7-5, 6-1.

Galo Blanco made a successful Munich debut with a 6-1, 7-6 (7/3) upset, sending out sixth-seeded fellow Spaniard Sergi Bruguera, a two-time French Open holder.

Sonics on verge of elimination

MINNEAPOLIS (AFP) — Seattle stumbled to the brink of elimination from the National Basketball Association playoffs here Tuesday while Portland and Atlanta kept alive their championship hopes.

Kevin Garnett scored 19 points and Stephon Marbury added 14 points and 11 rebounds to spark Minnesota past the SuperSonics 98-90, giving the Timberwolves a 2-1 edge over the Western Conference's number two seed.

Minnesota can close out the best-of-five series here Thursday.

"I'm not surprised. We have always been a confident team," Garnett said. "Now their backs are against the wall. The next game is do or die."

The Los Angeles Lakers and Charlotte Hornets missed chances to sweep their first round matchups. The Lakers lost 99-94 at Portland while the Hornets matched an NBA scoring futility mark in a 96-64 loss at Atlanta.

"We didn't execute well at all," Charlotte scoring leader Glen Rice said. "That's why it was such a lopsided score."

Miami beat New York 91-85 to grab a 2-1 edge and reclaim a home-court edge from the Knicks. That leaves the seventh-seeded Timberwolves as the team in the best position to pull a first-round upset.

"We're showing a lot of guts and a lot of character," Marbury said. "We lost our concentration but we came back. We are coming out and performing like we have to win."

Anthony Peeler and Sam Mitchell each had playoff career highs with 20 and 19 points respectively for Minnesota.

Gary Payton scored 26 points while Vin Baker had 17 points and 12 rebounds for Seattle, which fell behind 2-1 in last year's first round before rallying to eliminate Phoenix.

The Lakers squandered 36 points and 16 rebounds from Shaquille O'Neal



Charlotte Hornets Bobby Phillips (L) and Atlanta Hawks Steve Smith scramble for a loose ball in the first quarter of their NBA playoff game. Charlotte leads the best-of-five series 2-0 (Reuters photo)

while Portland's Damon Stoudamire and Isiah Rider each scored 18 points as the Trail Blazers try to avoid a fifth consecutive first round ouster.

"There are more miracles to come," Rider said. "We're happy, but not overly happy. They were flat-lined and we were fired up. Home court means a lot for us. Miracles can happen in our life. You never know."

The Lakers had checked out of their hotel, confident of the sweep, but Stoudamire sparked Portland in the fourth quarter. "That's what I call 'Damon time,'" he said.

At Atlanta, the Hawks matched the best defensive effort in NBA playoff history to avoid being swept, pulling within 2-1 in their first round series. The Hawks try to equalize at home on Thursday.

The Hawks posted their most lopsided playoff triumph in history and equaled a playoff record for fewest points allowed, matching the 64 Miami held Orlando to last year and Utah kept Portland to 64 in 1996.

Until the debate, the Hornets had never scored fewer than 80 points in a playoff game and had been limited to no less than 71 this season. Rice managed only eight points after averaging 29 the past two games.

"We knew the only way to win this basketball game

was to play defensively hard," said Dikembe Mutombo, who had 10 points and 11 rebounds. "Every time they were driving we double-teamed them very well."

Mookie Blaylock scored 16 points to lead six double-digit scorers for the Hawks, who swept four regular season games from Charlotte by an average of 17 points but lost the first two on the Hornets' home court.

Blaylock missed 10 of 12 shots in a game two loss but was 6-for-6 in scoring 14 first-half points as Atlanta built a 51-32 half-time edge.

Anthony Mason led Charlotte with 12 points while Vlade Divac added 11.

"We have to learn from this game," Divac said. "I would rather lose by 50 than by one because it makes you think about it. Now you know they're good. You have to prepare yourself mentally. It hurts your pride."

Miami's Voshon Lenard scored 28 points and the Heat claimed only its fourth triumph ever at Madison Square Garden. The Knicks try to equalize at home Thursday.

Tim Hardaway scored 27 for Miami while Allan Houston had 27 for the Knicks, but 18 of those came in the first quarter and none came in the fourth when the Knicks needed them most.

"With Allan Houston, we try to limit his shots," Lenard said. "We threw a couple of guys at him, tried to wear him as much as possible. Toward the end of the game, he got a little tired. We tried to work him."

Larry Johnson added 22 for the Knicks, who are on the brink of a first-round ouster for the first time since 1991.

Miami's Eric Murdock pulled his finger across his throat after a basket in the same cutting fashion that Knicks guard Chris Childs did in game two, an insult that lingered with Miami's Hardaway.

"This up here got right under my damn skin. I think we took that very personally. I think Eric Murdock did that tonight and we got on him for doing that. You just don't do that. You don't do that."

"I think I got myself in some trouble," Murdock said. "I really shouldn't have done it. I was caught in the emotions. I did it, but I apologize for it."

Reigning champion Chicago could sweep into the second round with a victory at New Jersey on Wednesday.

San Antonio could also advance by beating Phoenix at home while Utah, which matched the Bulls for the best regular-season mark, visits Houston with that series level at 1-1.

Jordan focuses on title as rumors swirl

CHICAGO (AFP) — Michael Jordan ignores the latest stories about future changes for the Chicago Bulls and concentrates on bringing the club its sixth National Basketball Association crown in eight years.

"We never know when the next curveball is coming," Jordan said. "But we know we have to go out and play the game. That's where our focus should be."

"We're mature adults and we know how to deal with things we really can't control. We just push it aside."

The latest reports have Iowa State University coach Tim Floyd, a pal of Bulls general manager Jerry Krause, taking over the club next season in place of coach Phil Jackson.

Jordan has said he will play for no coach other than Jackson. So with club and Floyd denying things,

Jordan goes about his business knowing the dynasty days might be done no matter what he does on the court.

"It hasn't happened yet so I'm not thinking about it," Jordan said. "I'm playing for Phil and finishing out the year."

The question of Jordan's future has not been decided

and will not be until the playoff run is over. Jordan finds the interest in whether or not he will return "amazing" even as he admits this is likely "the last dance" for the Bulls' current lineup.

"I can concentrate on the games on the court because when I'm out there it's like a little bit of heaven for me. Everything else is put aside in my mind and the game is the thing."

Jordan is going out in style after his 10th NBA scoring title. He scored 39 and 32 points in Chicago's opening two playoff victories over New Jersey here. The Bulls can complete a sweep on the road Wednesday.

Jordan has the highest career scoring average in NBA history at 31.5 points a game and is the only player to average more than 30 points a game in the playoffs, with 25 post-season games the minimum to consider.

"This is the real fun time," Jordan said of the playoffs. "It's the apex of the season, fighting so hard to get to this point. It's one last struggle to do what you have prepared yourself all season to do."

Jordan was the NBA Finals MVP for Chicago's

title runs in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996 and 1997. It has been eight years since he played a full season and did not win the NBA title. But he is far from complacent.

"It's still nerve wracking for me," Jordan said.

"I still think we're the best team in the league. I think we have the best chance to win the championship again. I wouldn't want to go into the playoffs with anything less than those thoughts."

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMMAM HIRSHI
01606 Tivoli Media Services, Inc.

WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

Q. 1 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

AKQ104 CK1088 Q874 48
Partner opens the bidding with one club. What do you respond?

Q. 2 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:

AAQ3 Q543 Q10 A310832

The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1s 1s
What do you bid now?

Q. 3 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:

AAQJ6 CK10754 AQ AA11
What is your opening bid?

Q. 4 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:

Q57832 072 QAT82 483

The bidding has proceeded:
WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
Pass 1s Pass ?
What action do you take?

Q. 5 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:

A10763 QJ9542 QAS 485

The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1s 1s 1s 1s
What action do you take?

Q. 6 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

AQ10 Q978 QKJ842 44
Partner opens the bidding with one spade. What do you respond?

<p>PHILADELPHIA 1'</p> <p>CRYING FREEMAN</p> <p>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>PHILADELPHIA 2'</p> <p>Yusra & Ilham Shahin ... in DANTELLA (ARABIC)</p> <p>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>PLAZA</p> <p>The biggest cinema production</p> <p>TITANIC</p> <p>Shows: 12:00, 3:00, 7:00, 10:30 p.m.</p>	<p>CONCORD</p> <p>CONCORD 11</p> <p>Kim Basinger ... in L.A. CONFIDENTIAL</p> <p>Shows: 12:30, 3:00, 6:30, 8:15, 10:45</p> <p>CONCORD 12</p> <p>ISMAILIA RAYEH GAI - KAMANANA</p> <p>Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>GALLERIA 2</p> <p>ABDOUN</p> <p>TITANIC & One of Walt Disney's best movies</p> <p>FLUBBER</p>	<p>GALLERIA 1</p> <p>ABDOUN</p> <p>GRAND OPENING</p> <p>TITANIC & SCREAM 2</p>	<p>Hisham Yanes Theater</p> <p>TEL: 4625155</p> <p>STARTING APRIL 6TH</p> <p>Don't Laugh Please We're Jordanian</p> <p>Starring Hisham Yanes, Amal Dabbas, Ramia Kurdi and the group</p> <p>at 8:30 p.m.</p> <p>For reservations call: 4640155, 4625155</p>
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Sports

Heated con in RACJ

By Roufan Nabhas
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The third round of the Speed Test kicks off Friday at the track of the Royal Automobile Club (RACJ).

Champion Ghouth Bilbeisi, at the first and the second rounds, a tough competition from several participants.

The Shadon brothers, Khazim Barkei who took second and third on April 24 will try to sweep Bilbeisi for first place.

Meanwhile, Yasser Jarrah who a first round with a split of a second Bilbeisi will try to regain his position which dropped to eighth second round.

Jarrah was given a ten-second penalty by the organising committee in the first round.

Irish swimmer

SYDNEY (AFP) — Triple Olympic gold medalist Michelle De Bruin of Ireland could be banned for life if found guilty of tampering with a doping sample.

Gunnar Werner, general secretary of swimming's governing body FINA, said Wednesday the 28-year-old De Bruin had manipulated a sample of a random test in January.

He would not say what he meant exactly but said there was no illegal drugs found in the test.

Athletes who have been found guilty of tampering with urine samples in the past either supplied some of their own urine or their own name they had stored in a tube, when they were asked to provide a sample. No swimmer has ever been found guilty of tampering with a test sample.

It's an open sanction for tampering, so it's up to the FINA doping panel to decide if it could be from a tube, Werner said.

"We can ask for a B sample to be tested and if she says it depends on what happens to that B sample."

"It's a suspect sample it goes on to the FINA doping panel and if not the case is over with."

The B sample must be tested within 21 days.

The test was taken in The Netherlands on January 8, the opening day of the world swimming championships in Perth which she failed to attend.

De Bruin, competing for her maiden name of De Bruin, stunned the swimming world when she won the first Olympic swimming gold medals in the 400m freestyle and the 400m and 800m medleys in 1996.

She also took silver behind Australians Lisa O'Neill and Petra Domschke in the 200m butterfly.

But she had to defend herself against allegations of tampering as she had failed to test in the past she was capable of.

Her husband, Peter De Bruin, a four-year positive for "Everything," but she was punished as said Werner.

"We have a positive test," Werner said. "We have a positive test," Werner said. "We have a positive test," Werner said.

The sport is a number 1 recent move January.

Kentucky Derby early favourite Indian

Cru after a early morning work out at Charlie is one of two horses trained by Bo Manning of the Kentucky Derby set for May 2.

Heated competition expected in RACJ's 3rd speed test

By Roufan Nahhas
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The third round of the Pepsi Speed Test kicks off Friday at the race track of the Royal Automobile Club of Jordan (RACJ).

Champion Ghazi Bilbeisi, who won the first and the second rounds, will face tough competition from several other participants.

The Shadian brothers, Khatchik and Barkev who took second and third places on April 24 will try to compete with Bilbeisi for first place.

Meanwhile, Yasser Jarrar who lost the first round with a split of a second to Bilbeisi will try to regain his advanced position which dropped to eighth in the second round.

Jarrar was given a ten-second penalty by the organising committee in the second round after arriving late at the RACJ.

The event will again miss the feminine touch. The only woman driver to compete in the second round was Abeer Batikhi. Maya Al Mufri who is taking part in Rally du Liban and Tala Al Shawa are again absent.

As usual the track will not be revealed to the drivers until Thursday when they are allowed to check the track on foot before Friday's event.

Meanwhile, RACJ is preparing for the May 14-15 Jordan International Rally, considered one of the most important rallies in the Middle East.

Thirty drivers from around the world are expected to take part in the event. Famous names such as United Arab Emirates' Mohammad Bin Sulayem, Saudi Arabia's Abdulrahman Bakhshab and Cyprus' Andreas Tsoloufas will be competing in the event.

Capriati back in business

HAMBURG (AFP) — Jennifer Capriati produced an upset victory over Florencia Labat, and sixth seed Sabine Appelmans of Belgium was tumbled out by Russia's Elena Likhovtseva on the opening day of the Intersport Ladies Grand Prix here Tuesday.

Capriati, now ranked 227 and playing just her fourth event of the year, humbled 34th-ranked Labat 6-2, 6-4 in 67 minutes with a composed performance that demonstrated she has added a very able backhand and fine footwork to her familiar forehand skills.

Capriati immediately placed her Argentinean opponent under pressure, gaining three break points in the opening game, and from 1-2 she reeled off eight straight games to win the first set and lead 3-0 in the second.

"I'm proud of myself, especially at the end staying tough and not letting it go to a third set, closing it out when I did," said Capriati.

Capriati's two recent victories in Amelia Island, Florida, boosted her confidence, and she was determined to keep the momentum going.

Appelmans was beaten 6-0, 3-6, 6-3, and admitted she had found difficulty in transferring to clay from her recent Fed Cup matches on hard courts.

"It was my first match on clay and I hadn't even practised on it," Appelmans revealed. "In the second set I felt the ball better and she made some mistakes, and in the third set I wanted to do certain things and they never worked. She was running very well and running to the corners, and every time I came to the net she passed me. Every time."

Fellow Belgian Dominique Van Roost has also passed Appelmans, in the rankings, but that is something she has taken in her stride.

"She's been playing unbelievably well," Appelmans conceded, "but she has her career and I have mine. In Belgium they started making comparisons between us and it would have been frustrating if my ranking had dropped a lot."

Chinese breaststroker Yuan Yuan and her coach Zhou Zhewen also received lengthy bans for the discovery of human growth hormones in Yuan's luggage on her arrival in Australia.

However FINA have lifted their suspensions pending further investigations into Chinese claims they were only guilty of using a herbal medicine.

The sport has been hit by a number of scandals in recent months. At the January world championships in Perth four Chinese swimmers tested positive for a banned diuretic which the International Olympic Committee this week officially condemned as a masking agent for steroids.

Chinese breaststroker Yuan Yuan and her coach Zhou Zhewen also received lengthy bans for the discovery of human growth hormones in Yuan's luggage on her arrival in Australia.

Sampras wins 1st match since getting back to No. 1

ATLANTA (AFP) — Pete Sampras won his first match since reclaiming his status as world tennis number one, beating fellow American Alex O'Brien at the ATP Challenge here Tuesday.

Sampras won 6-2, 7-6 (7/5), in a first-round match at the \$315,000 clay court event, a tuneup for the only major championship Sampras has not captured, the French Open.

Chile's Marcelo Rios ended a 102-week reign by Sampras after winning at Key Biscayne last month but has been sidelined with an injury to allow Sampras to reclaim the top spot.

Third-seeded American Jim Courier was upset by Brazil's Marcio Carlsom 6-3, 2-6, 6-4, in another night match.

First Division Basketball Championship Ahli, Orthodoxi meet Friday

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — All-time rivals Al Ahli and Al Orthodoxi play Friday with only one more match remaining before this year's First Division Basketball Championship concludes May 5.

Al Ahli, who ended Al Orthodoxi's 1976-1989 undisputed reign, were champions in 1990, 1992, 1993 and 1994 aided by the signing of Naser Bushnaq.

This year however, they are down to third after being in the runner up spot last season when Al Jazireh ended a 30-year drought to win the title.

Al Orthodoxi won in 1991, 1995 and 1996 and provided they beat Al Ahli Friday and Al Jazireh in the final match they will regain the title they held onto for the longest time.

Al Jazireh who beat Al Ahli 57-43 in the second playoff match to temporarily top the standings need to beat Al Orthodoxi by any score to retain the title.

Al Jazireh's have so far managed only one win over Al Orthodoxi 92-84 in the preliminary round. Their only two defeats this season were to Al Orthodoxi 73-69 in the preliminaries and 65-61 in the first playoff match.

They beat Al Ahli twice 75-69, and 57-53, and 78-63 in the first leg playoff match.

Al Orthodoxi beat Al Ahli 74-49 and 69-37 in the preliminaries and 84-61 in the first playoff match.

Al Ahli's poor physical conditioning and incomplete bench coupled with ill-effects of inadequate pre-season training has led to an inconsistent form that forced them to rely on the individual efforts of Faisal Nsour and Youssef Zaghloul.

Al Orthodoxi are therefore the favourites in Friday's match having a more complete lineup of substitutes, compared to the depleted bench of their opponents with Mohammad Shamali and Marwan Ma'touq both nursing injuries, and centre Ramez Hammouch quitting the team for personal reasons.

PLAYOFF STANDINGS

Team	P	W	L	SF	Sa	Pts
Jazireh	13	11	2	1086	753	24
Orthodoxi	12	11	1	986	660	23
Ahli	13	6	7	839	825	19

Irish swimmer faces life ban

SYDNEY (AFP) — Triple Olympic gold medalist Michelle de Bruin of Ireland could be banned for life if found guilty of tampering with a doping sample.

Gunnar Werner, general secretary of swimming's governing body FINA, said Wednesday the 28-year-old de Bruin had manipulated the sample of a random test in January.

He would not say what he meant exactly but said there were no illegal drugs found in the test.

Athletes who have been found guilty of tampering with urine samples in the past either supplied someone else's urine or their own urine they had stored in a fridge, when they were clean of drugs. No swimmer has ever been found guilty of tampering with a test sample.

"It's an open sanction for manipulation, so it's up to the FINA doping panel to decide. It could be from zero to life," Werner said.

"She can ask for a B sample to be tested and if she does, it depends on what happens to that B sample."

"If it is a suspect sample it goes on to the FINA doping panel, and if not the case is over with."

The B sample must be tested within 21 days.

The test was taken in The Netherlands on January 8, the opening day of the world swimming championships in Perth which she declined to attend.

De Bruin, competing under her maiden name of Smith, stunned the swimming world when she won Ireland's first Olympic swimming gold medals in the 400m freestyle and the 200m and 400m medleys in Atlanta. She also took bronze behind Australians Susie O'Neill and Peria Thomas in the 200m butterfly.

But she had to defend herself against allegations of drug use as she had failed to suggest in the past she was capable of beating the world's best.



Ireland's Michelle de Bruin, who competed at the 1996 Olympic Games under her maiden name Smith, raises her arms in jubilation after winning gold in the women's 200 individual medley at the 1996 Atlanta Games. The triple Olympic swimming champion could be banned for life (Reuters photo)

Her husband, Dutch shot putter and discus thrower Erik de Bruin, served a four-year ban after testing positive for testosterone.

"Everything is disappointing, but she has not yet been punished or found guilty," said Werner.

"We have to find her guilty first."

De Bruin has never tested positive but she was cautioned by FINA two years ago when she was not available to give a random test.

The sport has been hit by a number of scandals in recent months. At the January world championships in Perth four Chinese swimmers tested positive for a banned diuretic which the International Olympic Committee this week officially condemned as a masking agent for steroids.

However FINA have lifted their suspensions pending further investigations into Chinese claims they were only guilty of using a herbal medicine.

Chinese breaststroker Yuan Yuan and her coach Zhou Zhewen also received lengthy bans for the discovery of human growth hormones in Yuan's luggage on her arrival in Australia.



Kentucky Derby early favourite Indian Charlie is washed down by groom Jose Cruz after a early morning work out at Churchill Downs in Louisville. Indian Charlie is one of two horses trained by Bob Baffert that are running in the 124th running of the Kentucky Derby set for May 2 (Reuters photo)

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Sydney turn down Nebiolo

SYDNEY (AFP) — Sydney Olympic organisers have rejected a claim from International Amateur Athletic Federation President Primo Nebiolo for free tickets and hotel bedrooms for officials. "No we won't be able to give them free," Sydney Olympic Organising Committee President Michael Knight said Wednesday. Nebiolo, as president of the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations, put his bid in for free tickets and accommodation at the ASOIF meeting with the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee.

Salt Lake City waiting for women's call

SYDNEY (AFP) — Salt Lake City Olympics organisers are waiting to hear from the international federations what new women's sports they want to add to the 2002 Winter Games. "We are waiting to hear from the international federations before we can evaluate the proposals," Salt Lake City organising committee president Frank Joklik said here Wednesday. Bobsleigh, doubles luge and ski jumping are the women's events most likely to be added to the 2002 programme if the federations come up with a proposal. Women's hockey was introduced at the 1998 Nagano Winter Games. Joklik ruled out doubts that American brewer Anheuser Busch would be forced to withdraw as a sponsor because of local opposition. "Some Salt Lake City people did air their concerns but this sponsorship will not be dropped," he said.

55,000 World Cup tickets left

PARIS (AFP) — A total of 27 World Cup matches are sold out following the sale of another 14,000 tickets on Tuesday, organisers said. The organising committee said 55,000 tickets were still available and that phone lines to take further bookings would be open again Wednesday from 0600 to 1800 GMT. Organisers originally put 110,000 on telephone sale but added 60,000 more on Monday after several national federations returned those they were unable to sell. The first batch were placed on sale by phone last week but sold relatively slowly as the organisers were deluged with some 20 million calls from around Europe to just a handful of telecom operators.

WTA moves Open tuneup to New Haven

NEW HAVEN (AFP) — The WTA's U.S. Hardcourt Championships, the final tuneup event for the U.S. Open, will move here from Atlanta, the U.S. Tennis Association said Tuesday. The \$450,000 women's event will be contested the week following an ATP Tour men's event on the same Connecticut Tennis Center courts. The tournament will run from August 24-29, ending two days before the US Open begins in New York. World number two and reigning Olympic champion Lindsay Davenport of the United States will come here to defend the crown she won last year in Atlanta at the 32-player event. "I'm excited about the move and I'm looking forward to playing in front of all the great tennis fans," she said. "This will be a great tune-up for the U.S. Open for me."

BritishBank Foundation Scholarship

The BritishBank Foundation is pleased to offer one scholarship for MA studies in Heritage Management at the Ironbridge Institute, University of Birmingham, during the 1998-99 academic year.

The Heritage Management course at the Ironbridge Institute starts on 29 September 1998 and is designed to train professionals with the skills required to identify a heritage resource, ensure that it is cared for, made accessible, and passed on to future generations. It is designed for people working in, or planning to work in, museums, historic properties or cultural landscapes.

The BritishBank Foundation is looking for a scholar with a record of excellence, either professional or academic, who will use his/her studies in the UK in the application of their work in Jordan. Priority is given to candidates with excellent command of English working in archaeology, planning, tourism or architecture. Candidates should, preferably, be under the age of 40.

Application forms along with detailed information on the scholarship, the Heritage Studies course at the Ironbridge Institute, as well as on completing the form can be collected from Manager Personal Banking, BritishBank, Jabal Hussein branch or the British Council, Jabal Amman, during the period 28 April - 11 May 1998. The deadline for receiving completed applications is 17 May 1998.

Any submitted documents cannot be reclaimed and must therefore be a photocopy and not an original.

Short listed candidates will be invited for an interview and the successful candidate advised by 10 June 1998.

BritishBank Foundation, Amman

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Afghanistan's warring factions took a major step toward ending a two-decade long war that has devastated their homeland by agreeing Wednesday to a controversial commission of religious scholars.

The formation of the commission has been the critical issue at peace talks being held in neighbouring Pakistan, the first between the feuding sides in two years.

Both sides will appoint delegates to the commission and neither side will have the right to veto the other's delegates, said Ibrahim Bakr, the assistant secretary general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and co-sponsor of the peace talks along with the United Nations.

This commission of ulema will rule the country in line with Sharia or Islamic law, Mr. Bakr told reporters during a break in negotiations. The members of the commission will interpret the Islamic law

and both sides in the conflict have agreed to abide by their decision.

No date for the formation of this commission was announced.

The breakthrough came on the fourth consecutive day of talks, which were brokered by Washington's Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson.

For the first time since talks began in Islamabad on Sunday, the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Thomas Simons attended the negotiations.

It was unclear whether he played any role in the negotiations, but he had accompanied Richardson to Afghanistan on April 17 when the U.N. ambassador got the two sides to agree to peace negotiations.

"We have sacrificed a lot in this regard," said Abdul Hakim Mujahid, a negotiator on the Taleban army's team and the Taleban's ambassador to Pakistan. He didn't offer any details.

LONDON (AFP) — A spokesman for British Premier Tony Blair warned Tuesday against expecting "diplomatic fireworks" at next month's London Middle East peace talks, stressing they were aimed at simply keeping the peace process alive.

"The objective is to keep the process going rather than to have any spectacular, diplomatic coups," the spokesman said.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will hold separate meetings on May 4 with Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in the hope of kick-starting the process after more than a year of stalemate.

"The important thing is to keep them talking," the spokesman said, describing the talks as a workman-like affair not expected to result in "pyrotechnics and diplomatic fireworks." Earlier in the day a British diplomatic source said no direct meeting had been planned between the two leaders.

The meetings were proposed by Mr. Blair as a neutral venue during a visit to Israel earlier this month.

British representatives were not expected to take part in the talks, a British Foreign Office spokesman said, adding that "the Americans are taking the lead."

The talks are expected to focus on a four-point U.S. peace package calling for a staged Israeli withdrawal from 13 per cent of the West Bank in tandem with Palestinian steps against anti-Israeli guerrillas.

The peace process has been stalled since Israel began building the contested Har Homa settlement in east Jerusalem at the start of 1997.

RAFAH (AFP) — Israeli border guards threatened to arrest a Palestinian notorious for the 1985 hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise liner in which an American Jew was killed, Palestinian security sources said Wednesday.

Mohammed Abbas, known by his nom de guerre Abu Al Abbas, and an aide were stopped by Israeli soldiers on Monday as they tried to cross the Rafah crossing from Egypt to Gaza, where he lives, said a Palestinian security official.

"Israeli security informed us that there is a political decision to prevent Abu Al Abbas from entering the Palestinian territories and to arrest him if he tries," said the official, who asked not to be named.

Palestinian security at Rafah said Abbas holds a so-called "VIP card," issued by the Palestinian National Authority and approved by Israel, which allows him to move freely through border crossings.

"The Israelis insisted on arresting him, so we closed the Rafah border for two hours in protest. After high-level political contacts, he and his aide were allowed to enter," said the official.

The Palestinian daily Al Ayyam said Palestinian police also formed a human shield around Mr. Abbas to prevent Israeli soldiers from detaining him.

Israeli border officials have tried twice in the past month to arrest Mr. Abbas as he crossed the Allenby Bridge from Jordan to the West Bank, the official said.

Mr. Abbas, head of the Palestinian Liberation Front, a small Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) faction, planned the October 1985 hijacking of the Italian cruise boat Achille Lauro, during which a paraplegic American tourist, Leon Klinghoffer, was murdered.

Among other attacks, his group also tried to land commandos on a beach south of Tel Aviv in May 1990. The fighters were immediately arrested, but when President Yasser Arafat refused to condemn the attempt, the United States cut off a nascent dialogue with the PLO.

Israel's previous Labour government allowed Mr. Abbas to return to Gaza in 1996 to attend a meeting of the PLO's "parliament," the Palestine National Council, which voted to amend the PLO charter to remove clauses calling for the destruction of Israel.

SANAA (AFP)—An influential Yemeni tribe has begun mediation efforts to win the freedom of a British family kidnapped by a neighbouring tribe, tribal officials said Tuesday.

"At the request of the authorities in Sanaa, Sheikh Mohammad Ben Jaji Al Ghader, chief of the Khawalan tribe, neighbours of the Bani Dabayan tribe which carried out the abduction, began mediating Tuesday," a Khawalan official said.

"Sheikh Ghader sent two representatives to try to convince them to unconditionally release the British hostages," the official, who asked not to be identified, said.

The sheikh "is an influential member of his tribe and is respected by other tribes in the region including the Bani Dabayan," he said.

Earlier mediation efforts "by Sanaa's governor, Mohammad Abdallah Al Sufi, failed," he said, without saying why.

British teacher David Mitchell, his wife Carolyn and their 14-year-old son Ben were taken hostage by armed tribesmen April 16 while driving to Sanaa airport from the southern city of Aden.

David Pearce, deputy head of the British embassy, said the hostages were reported to be "safe and well."

Yemeni security forces have "tightened up the cordon sanitaire on the village" of Qudrah where the hostages are being held in a rough, mountainous region near Dhamar in south-east Yemen, Mr. Pearce said.

The British government, meanwhile, has reiterated to the Yemeni authorities "that it wants a peaceful solution," said Mr. Pearce.

Mr. Mitchell, who works for the British Council, has twice sent faxes to the embassy. He has called on the authorities to act quickly to obtain their release.

The Mitchells' kidnappers had been on the point of releasing them last Friday, tribal sources said. But an argument between the tribesmen wanting government aid for their region prevented the release from going ahead.

By Hisham Abdullah
Agence France Presse

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM
— Fifty years after losing the chance at a state, the Palestinians are still waiting not only for a political solution to their plight but for recognition of the "catastrophe" which shattered their lives.

"There can never be an end to this situation until there is an apology from Britain and Israel for what happened in the Nakba," said Ali Al Jarbawi, a political science professor in

Beir Zeit University in the West Bank. "They have to admit a moral responsibility for what happened to the Palestinians," Prof. Jarbawi said.

"Nakba" — Arabic for "catastrophe" — is the term Palestinians use for the 1948 war, when Israeli army attacked the Palestinian civilians and left hundreds of thousands of them homeless.

While Israel celebrates its creation during that war, Palestinians reflect on years of living without a nation, whether abroad as homeless

refugees or under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967.

"We have lived for long decades in hopelessness and poverty caused by the Nakba which befell us," said novelist Ezzat Al Ghazawi.

Mr. Ghazawi's grandmother was killed in 1948 when Jewish troops shelled his family's village of Qaoun, whose ruins now lay outside the north Israeli town of Natanya.

His son was later killed by Israeli soldiers during the 1987-1994 intifada uprising in the

occupied territories.

"My father was left with deep scars by the death of my grandmother. Then I lost my son," said Mr. Ghazawi, who was born three years after the war and now heads the Palestinian Writers Union in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Palestinian despair has not been lifted by the peace process launched with Israel in 1993, which the Palestinians hope will lead to the creation of a state in the territories but which has come to a near complete

The Taliban army had been demanding that only religious scholars participate on the commission, while their northern-based opponents have been seeking a broader definition that would include scholars of other disciplines, as well as Islamic ideology.

It appeared that the co-sponsors of the talks sidestepped the issue of definition of religious scholar by getting both sides to agree not to veto the other's selection of delegates to the commission.

Negotiations in the Pakistani capital were expected to continue at least until Friday. Other agenda items, such as a cease fire and prisoner exchange, will be discussed, said Mr. Bakr.

The United Nations is hoping that the two sides will end this round of talks with a prolonged cease fire.

In the 85 per cent of Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban army, led by Islamic seminarians, a harsh form of Islamic law has been imposed.

Women no longer can work. Schools for girls have been closed and men have to grow beards and wear a head covering.

Most Taliban soldiers belong to Afghanistan's majority Pashtun ethnic group and their opponents, belonging to the country's minorities, say their edicts reflect tribal traditions rather than Islamic law.

In the northern 15 per cent of Afghanistan where the Taliban's enemies rule, the laws are not so harsh, but the lawlessness in the area has made it impossible for international aid organisations to remain in Mazr-e-Sharif, the opposition stronghold.

A divided anti-Taliban alliance has been wracked by ferocious infighting, much of it between troops loyal to Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum and Shiite Muslims belonging to Hezb-e-Wahadat.

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — A new "oil-for-food" arrangement, which allows sanctions-hit Iraq to sell oil to buy food and medicine, could come into effect in two or three weeks, Iraqi Oil Minister Amer Rashid said Tuesday.

He said Baghdad was finalising a distribution plan, which will need to be approved by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

CAIRO (AFP) — British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook heaped praise on the "pragmatic approach" of Iranian foreign policy under President Mohammad Khatami, in an interview published on Wednesday.

"We applaud the Iranian government's efforts to develop a civil society and institutionalise respect for the rule of law," Mr. Cook told the London-based Arabic daily Al Hayat, which is also published in Cairo and other Arab capitals.

"We also welcome the more pragmatic direction of Iran's foreign policy," Mr. Cook said, according to the English text of the interview.

The foreign secretary praised Mr. Khatami, a moderate cleric elected in May last year, for showing "interest in developing understanding between civilisations."

He also described recent visits to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain by former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as "signs that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Iran are starting to develop a closer understanding on security and other matters."

Mr. Cook said these "positive steps" convinced the European Union (EU) in February to resume dialogue with Iran after a ten-month break prompted by a German court verdict implicating Tehran's regime in the assassination of Kurdish opposition leaders in Berlin in 1992.

Britain, which currently holds the EU rotating presidency, is "liaising with the Iranian government over arrangements for a first meeting. I hope this will take place soon," Mr. Cook said.

But he expressed concern over Iran's record of "support to terrorism and its support for groups who use violence to subvert the Middle East peace process" and arms proliferation.

The British foreign secretary angered the Iranian leadership earlier this month with charges that it had attempted to buy British nuclear technology.

In a break with the secrecy traditionally surrounding Britain's security services, Mr. Cook said that the foreign intelligence service MI6 and the GCHQ communications monitoring agency had "tracked Iran's nuclear weapons programme and have enabled us to disrupt Iranian attempts to procure British technology."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mohammadi described the charges as "baseless" and said they were an attempt to cover up a row in Britain over the delivery of a consignment of Georgian nuclear waste.

Relations between Britain and Iran have been severely strained since the Islamic republic issued a death sentence against British author Salman Rushdie in 1989 over his book "The Satanic Verses," saying it was an insult to Islam.

Britain is represented in Iran by a charge d'affaires and not an ambassador, as is the case for all other members of the EU.

Mr. Cook spoke to Al Hayat on the eve of a meeting between officials from the EU and the GCC, which comprises Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

The meeting, expected to take place in Brussels on Wednesday, is aimed at bolstering ties between the two regional bodies as well as discussing Iran, Iraq and the Middle East peace process, Mr. Cook said.

WASHINGTON (AFP) — President Bill Clinton is expected to decide in the next couple of weeks whether to reduce U.S. military forces in the Gulf in response to easing tensions with Iraq, the Pentagon said.

Two U.S. aircraft carriers, some 37,000 U.S. troops, and scores of extra fighters and bombers have been tied down in the Gulf for more than five months by the confrontation over U.N. arms inspections in Iraq, causing strains for the U.S. military.

Besides costing more, the increased tempo of operations have created problems for the air force and the navy, which has been unable to keep carriers in the Mediterranean and the Western Pacific because of the crisis.

"The president will have to decide whether two carriers [in the Gulf] is the proper level or whether we would move down to a lower level," said Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon.

Mr. Bacon said he anticipated that Mr. Clinton would make a decision "in the next couple of weeks."

"I think he will look across the board at aircraft, ships and soldiers in the Gulf," Mr. Bacon said.

The spokesman said conditions in the Gulf were "somewhat less threatening" than they were when the crisis began last fall.

"Whatever decision the president makes in the next couple of weeks when he reviews this will be subject to change if conditions change," he said, adding that if Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "refuses to remain peaceful and placid, we will build up our forces again if the circumstances warrant it."

Relief from their 'catastrophe'

VICENZA (R) — Armed robbers stole gold worth \$1.4 million from an Italian bank on Tuesday, just 50 meters from the local police station, AGI news agency reported. The four, wearing ski masks, tied up staff at a branch of Banca Di Roma in Vicenza, northern Italy, and grabbed 130 kg. in gold ingots and 150 million lire in cash before making off by car.

NEW YORK (R) — A legal newspaper is marking law day this week with a report on bizarre actions by judges that include biting a defendant, urinating on a carpet and throwing a firecracker into another jurist's office. In its latest weekly issue, the National Law Journal ran an article, which highlights its "top 10 list of the most amazing antics by judges." Among those cited a judge who apparently lost it at a bail hearing and made dental history along with the likes of boxer Mike Tyson, another judge, was accused with various misdeeds like urinating on a female colleagues' carpet, throwing a lighted firecracker into another judge's office. And signing orders with fictitious names like snow white.

LONDON (R) — Watch out, Superman. Tights for men could be the new fashion statement of the nineties. A British hosiery firm is launching a new range of hosiery for men who feel comfortable enough about their masculinity to stride around in clinging tights like Shakespearean heroes or regency bucks. But women warn the tights could make the "new man" wearers hot and sweaty for all the wrong reasons and men fear their sperm count could fall. "We have had lots of calls at our head office in Austria and via the Internet expressing interest in men's tights," said the company spokesman.

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Producer Aaron Spelling lost his bid for a rental over a \$4.8 million judgement in favour of a pregnant actress he fired. Not only did judge Fumiko Wesserman rule against Spelling's request, but she also granted hunter Tylo \$900,000 she demanded to cover her legal expenses during the trial. Tylo, 34, was fired in March 1996, one month after Spelling hired her to play a seductress in the popular television series "Melrose Place," when he found out she was pregnant. Tylo said through her lawyer Gloria Allred that she was pleased with the judge's decision confirming the Dec. 12 verdict.

PARIS (AFP) — Movie director Roman Polanski has been elected to the French Academy of Fine Arts. Polanski, who was born in Paris in 1933, has directed many of the greatest games in cinema in a career spanning 40 years. His roll-call of films includes "Repulsion," starring Catherine Deneuve, "Chinatown" with Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway, "Death and the Maiden" with Sigourney Weaver and "Frantic" with Harrison Ford. "Tess" won him a Golden Globe Award in 1980. He has also directed Isabelle Adjani, Mia Farrow

UAE sends 16th aid ship


ABU DHABI (AFP) — A new supplies has sailed to Iraq from the emirate, the 16th aid shipment from the United Arab Emirates, according to press reports from Baghdad.

The ship sailed from the northern port of Khalaimah on Thursday with 400 tonnes of food, clothing, medicine, milk and other supplies, the 16th shipment and the last of the "humanitarian" aid, said the coordinator of the relief effort, a UN official.

The aid is being sent to Iraq from private donations in the UAE and is the first of a series of aid shipments called for lifting the embargo on Iraq by the United Nations against Iraq for its invasion of neighbouring Kuwait. Several private aid shipments have been also sent to Iraq by the Red Crescent Society over the past few

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"This was

laid Anani on delivered a message from him to King Hussein to let President Yasser ir bin decision to let the latest American to jump-start the Middle East peace process.

(The King Hussein Majesty King Hussein, after an oral message from President Arafat, said that the visit to King Hussein would be to several countries and not to Jordan alone.)

Dr. Anani told after holding talks with Arafat in Ramallah that these countries were appreciative of the support for the peace process.

The talks were held in the presence of King Hussein and Tammuz al-Majidi on the May 4. The aim was to overcome a troop redeployment in the West Bank.

Mr. Arafat, Middle East Peace Process, Dennis Ross, and is due to Vice President today. "I will be with Mr. Gore here and the peace process is current in the Middle East."

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drawn. Mr. Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, was to hold a meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State on Monday. U.S. officials said they expected the talks to be difficult. However, Mr. Netanyahu seemed ready to meet with the Clinton administration, saying Friday that his friendship with the United States would not be over the London talks.

In a joint news conference with Mr. Netanyahu, Gore was asked about aspects of Middle Eastern peace.